

LIGUE 1 2016/2017:

YOUR GUIDE TO THE SEASON AHEAD

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A Note from the Editor:

For many, Ligue 1 cannot restart quickly enough following an almost perfect, but fundamentally cruel EURO 2016 for France on home soil. The pain suffered on that night in Paris by Didier Deschamps's men and an entire nation remains all the more heartrending because of the newfound professionalism that Les Bleus conducted themselves with throughout the tournament.

Karim Benzema antics aside, contrary to years of squad infighting, the team spirit inside the French camp was the strongest it had been since 2000. On the pitch, France proved that they are on the cusp of a new golden generation, with Samuel Umtiti, Kingsley Coman and Antoine Griezmann all shining. Although some of Les Bleus' much touted young guns fell short of expectations, namely Paul Pogba and Anthony Martial, France's U19 EURO win further confirms that the future is astonishingly bright for French football on the international scene.

One would not be foolish to expect there to be some turnover of talent for the 2018 World Cup cycle, with Patrice Evra and others' involvement coming to an end. Much like Les Bleus therefore, Ligue 1 too can expect a very different feel for the 2016/17 season.

PSG have entered a new era after President Al Khelaifi's obsession for progression in the Champions' League failed to be adequately satisfied by Laurent Blanc, leading to the latter's dismissal. Les Parisiens have appointed Unai Emery in Blanc's place, who brings a new-age management approach that relies on a squad instead of a team of individuals, a charge often leveled at Blanc's PSG.

One such high-profile individual has departed. French football fans never loved Zlatan Ibrahimovic unanimously, but he undeniably raised the profile of Ligue 1 and for that we can all be thankful. His goal-scoring ability reached another level in 2015/16, if that was even possible. His capacity to produce unpredictable moments of magic with both his feet and his mouth will be sorely missed and we wish him well in England.

After failing to lure a high-profile replacement to the French capital for the big Swede, PSG's new approach seems to be to sacrifice entertainment & brand-building for European success. We will soon see if this altered approach pays off, even if Hatem Ben Arfa's signing will ensure that Les Parisiens's on-pitch activities remain far from boring.

Elsewhere on the Ligue 1 scene, the unassuming Bruno Genesio will continue to lead Lyon after single-handedly turning Lyon's 2015/16 campaign from one of mid-table mediocrity to Champions League qualification. Umtiti has left for Barcelona, but star striker Alexandre Lacazette seems set to stay and Lyon have in the main recruited well, leading President Aulas to believe that his side can challenge PSG this season.

This time last year, we were all salivating over the prospect of a second campaign for Marseille under the leadership of Marcelo Bielsa. OM's pre-season hopes were quickly extinguished when the Argentine walked out after the campaign's first fixture of the season, citing disagreements with the board. Between then and now, Marseille appointed the equally hapless as he was hopeless Michel, sacked him, appointed coach Franck Passi in his place and retained him for the 2016/17 adventure.

The owner Margarita Louis Dreyfus is set to imminently sell the club but in order to convince potential investors that the ship is not suffering from cash flow problems, she instructed outward bound President Vincent Labrune to institute a squad-wide fire-sale. This has left Passi with a squad containing a mixture of baby-faced youth teamers and a selection of low-cost journeymen dug up from the lowest echelons of the summer transfer market, with just days to go before the new season begins.

Whatever happens, Marseille's peculiar situation will remain eye-catching throughout the season ahead. Monaco continue to profit from their model of signing cheaply and selling big, scraping provisional Champions League qualification under the ever-tactically gifted Leonardo Jardim.

Other sides who will challenge at the top of the table include OGC Nice, who were the best watch last season, showcasing a beautiful brand of football that enabled their then manager Claude Puel to take over at Southampton. In Lucien Favre, Les Aiglons, rather unbelievably, have grabbed an adequate replacement.

Christophe Galtier's St Étienne and Lille under Frédéric Antonetti will continue to feature prominently up the Ligue 1 table, the key difference this term is that they also have squads capable of succeeding in the Europa League whilst managing the domestic calendar. Lille have disappointingly fallen at the first European hurdle.

ESTAC Troyes made history last season by officially becoming the worst side in the latest edition of Ligue 1, recording the lowest ever points total. Minnows Gazelec Ajaccio, who fought bravely fell short and Stade de Reims's squad was badly managed from the get-go, leading them to complete the three fallen sides to descend to Ligue 2.

Dijon, Metz and Nancy enter the French top-flight arena and all three clubs have considerable experience in these surroundings. The transition from Ligue 2 is always challenging however, and the trio must continue to reinforce if their stay is to be longer than a single season.

With Zlatan gone & new ownership afoot elsewhere in Ligue 1, maybe this is the season where the French top flight becomes a more level playing field? Let the games begin.



ANGERS SCO

Angers SCO: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Denis Petric	GK	Serbian	28	2015/2016	ESTAC Troyes
Alexandre Letellier	GK	French	24	2010/2011	PSG B
Yoann Andreu	LB	French	27	2015/2016	Gazélec Ajaccio
Ibrahim Diallo	LB	Guinean	30	2012/2013	Waasland-Beveren
Pablo Martinez	LB	French	27	2016/2017	Gazélec Ajaccio
Kalifa Traore	CB	Malian	25	2014/2015	PSG
Ismael Traore	CB	Ivorian	29	2015/2016	Stade Brestois
Gregory Bourillon	CB	French	32	2015/2016	Stade de Reims
Romain Thomas	CB	French	28	2013/2014	Carquefou
Mateo Pavlovic	CB	Croatian	26	2016/2017	Werder Bremen
Gabriel Mutombo	CB	French	20	2016/2017	-
Vincent Manceau	RB	French	27	2008/2009	-
Aissa Laïdouni	RB	French	19	2016/2017	-
Romain Saïss	DM	French	26	2015/2016	Havre AC
Cheikh Ndoïe	DM	Senegalese	30	2015/2016	US Créteil
Thomas Mangani	DM	French	29	2015/2016	Chievo Verona
Baptiste Santamaria	CM	French	21	2016/2017	Tours FC
Flavien Tait	AM	French	23	2016/2017	Chateauroux
Pierrick Capelle	LW	French	29	2015/2016	Clermont
Mathias Serin	LW	French	24	2015/2016	Romorantin
Gilles Sunu	LW/RW	French	25	2015/2016	Evian TG
Billy Ketkeophomphone	LW/RW	French	26	2015/2016	Tours FC
Famara Diedhiou	ST	Senegalese	23	2016/2017	Clermont Foot
Karl Toko Ekambi	ST	Cameroonian	23	2016/2017	FC Sochaux
Ferebory Dore	ST	Congolese	27	2015/2016	Botev Plovdiv
Dickson Nwakaeme	ST	Nigerian	30	2016/2017	Pahang FA
Nicolas Pepe	ST	French	21	2015/2016	-
Ludovic Ajorque	ST	French	22	2014/2015	-
Stephane Moulin	Manager	French	48	2011/2012	SO Chatellerault
Said Chabane	President	Algerian	53	2011/2012	-



ANGERS SCO

Angers SCO: Squad Analysis

Angers surprised everyone with an explosive first half of the 2015/2016 campaign: they sat only behind PSG in 2nd in the Ligue 1 table after 17 matches played. Although Stéphane Moulin's men's momentum was halted in January and they trickled away towards the end of the campaign, Angers's first return to top-flight football since 1993/1994 can only go down as a success, finishing 9th. Now, the club will seek to prove they are anything but a one-season wonder and that their ultra-physical, aesthetically displeasing but effective style of play can serve as a blueprint for survival for Ligue 1 clubs with limited resources.

Strengths:

To finish in the top 10, as a newly promoted side, was an utterly remarkable feat for Angers and certain stars were obviously going to be born in the process. What is even more brilliant for the club is that many of those individuals appear ready and willing to stay, refusing to let their heads be turned by a throng of Europe's upper-middle elite. Heroes were born across the field, but tenacious central defender Romain Thomas and defensive midfielder Romain Saïss stood out particularly. Their level of focus and consistency in crucial positions not only allowed Angers to distinguish themselves almost immediately from the 2015/2016 relegation candidates, but gave the rest of the squad the necessary belief that manager Moulin's style of play could succeed. Stéphane Moulin's disciplined, but fundamentally warm approach to his players is also one of the side's major strengths. The recruitment of Ligue 2's best two strikers from last term, Karl Toko Ekambi and Famara Diedhiou, should solve Angers' biggest previous weakness: the lack of a reliable goalscorer.

Weaknesses:

Angers fans can take heart in the fact that a lot of holes in the squad have been plugged with wise additions across the pitch. The departure in January of one of Angers' main secrets to success, goalkeeper Ludovic Butelle to Club Brugge, is however something they have arguably failed to adequately compensate for. Alexandre Letellier is expected to receive the #1 shirt for the upcoming campaign, but remains largely erratic between the sticks. One of their strengths is also arguably one of their greatest limitations: their physically exerting, energy-sapping style of play ensured that they ran out of steam by January last season. If they are pushing for Europe, Moulin will need to have a tactical rethink.

Verdict:

Angers will be weary of avoiding the second season syndrome that sometimes affects smaller Ligue 1 sides. To combat this fear, Angers have headed to the high streets of the transfer market. With Sporting Director Olivier Pickeu's ability to spot diamonds in the rough on a regular basis complemented by President Saïd Chabane's candor in transfer negotiations, Angers have made some remarkably canny deals already, especially in attacking areas, but also with the signings of Baptiste Santamaria and Flavien Tait. The down side of exceeding expectations in the French top flight is that the English will tend to come shopping in your direction. Angers' board members will be nervously twitching right up until deadline day.

PREDICTED POSITION: 10TH



ANGERS SCO

Angers SCO: Likely XI



Angers SCO: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	9th	50
2014/2015	Ligue 2	3rd	64
2013/2014	Ligue 2	9th	55
2012/2013	Ligue 2	5th	61
2011/2012	Ligue 2	11th	51

Angers SCO: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	C. N'Doye	9
2014/15	Ligue 2	J. Kodjia	15
2013/14	Ligue 2	Mohamed Yattara	11
2012/13	Ligue 2	Claudiu Keseru	17
2011/12	Ligue 2	Gaetan Charbonnier	12

Angers SCO: Key Man

CHEIKH N'DOYE

At 1.90m, this monstrosity of a man is the definition of a leader by example and as an individual encapsulates Angers' spirit and style of play.

Made captain last season, Cheikh N'Doye immediately thrust himself onto the radar of a handful of Premier League clubs due to his sheer physicality and ability to break up opposition attacks with ease.

Not only is N'Doye an excellent defensive midfielder compliment to Romain Saiss, but also he is a great danger going forward for Angers.

His powerful running ability matched by his lethality from set-pieces make him an invaluable cornerstone of Moulin's project.

His bumbling enthusiasm more than makes up for some of the limper areas of his game including poor technical control, but can also be identified by French officials as an over-exuberant tendency in the tackle that sometimes lands him in trouble.



AS MONACO

AS Monaco: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Morgan De Sanctis	GK	Italian	39	2016/2017	AS Roma
Danijel Subasic	GK	Croatian	31	2011/2012	Hajduk Split
Benjamin Mendy	LB	French	22	2016/2017	Marseille
Elderson Echiejile	LB	Nigerian	28	2013/2014	Sporting Braga
Kamil Glik	CB	Polish	28	2016/2017	Torino
Marcel Tisserand	CB	French	23	2013/2014	-
Andrea Raggi	CB	Italian	32	2012/2013	Bologna
Jemerson	CB	Brazilian	23	2015/2016	Atletico Mineiro
Fabinho	RB	Brazilian	22	2013/2014	Rio Ave
Almamy Toure	RB	French	20	2014/2015	-
Djibril Sidibe	RB	French	23	2016/2017	Lille OSC
Tiémoué Bakayoko	DM	French	21	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Jonathan Mexique	DM	French	21	2015/2016	-
Joao Moutinho	CM	Portuguese	29	2013/2014	FC Porto
Bernardo Silva	AM	Portuguese	21	2014/2015	SL Benfica
Fares Bahlouli	AM	French	21	2015/2016	Olympique Lyonnais
Adama Traore	AM	Malian	21	2015/2016	Lille OSC
Thomas Lemar	AM	French	20	2015/2016	SM Caen
Ivan Cavaleiro	LW/RW	Portuguese	22	2015/2016	SL Benfica
Kylian Mbappé	LW	French	17	2015/2016	-
Nabil Dirar	RW	Moroccan	30	2011/2012	FC Bruges
Vagner Love	ST	Brazilian	32	2015/2016	Corinthians
Guido Carrillo	ST	Argentinian	25	2015/2016	Estudiantes
Falcao	ST	Colombian	30	2013/2014	Atletico Madrid
Valere Germain	ST	French	26	2011/2012	-
Corentin Jean	ST	French	21	2015/2016	ESTAC Troyes
Mohamed Ilyes Chaibi	ST	French	19	2015/2016	Evian TG FC
Leonardo Jardim	Manager	Portuguese	41	2012/2013	Sporting Lisbon
Dimitri Rybolovlev	President	Russian	48	2011/2012	-



AS MONACO

AS Monaco: Squad Analysis

The AS Monaco project is unique because it is constantly rebooting and rebuilding. The disruption that occurs to the playing squad every transfer window, thanks to the board's consistent sales of prospects that have developed enough to peak the interest of Europe's elite, is a reality that manager Leonardo Jardim unenviably continues to deal with. The Portuguese technician's most difficult task to date came when his board decided to sell Anthony Martial on transfer deadline day to Manchester United, leaving him without his key striker nor the time to replace him. Thus, Monaco stuttered in the first half of the 2015/2016 campaign and were ultimately saved in their quest for Champions League qualification by the failings of Marseille and for a time Lyon, rather than through their own heroics. Monaco fans hope they will see less bleeding in the way of players departing this summer, providing a form of stability to enable the club to take on PSG and mount a title challenge.

Strengths:

Leonardo Jardim has been forced to drastically alter his typically conservative style of play to a more risk-taking approach, owing to a lack of proficient defensive options. A bold 4-4-2 formation, with Falcao and Germain up top, is now in the offing, which will win support from Ligue 1 partisans, as it should make Monaco more pleasing on the eye. Often referred to as the FC Porto of Ligue 1 and despite a great number of player sales, Monaco retain some of the hottest prospects in European football. Thomas Lemar stands to become one of Ligue 1's leading lights this season if Jardim affords him the playing time (the pair have a rocky personal relationship). In the signings of excellent Polish international Kamil Glik in defence, AS Monaco have an excellent, if not overdue replacement for Aymen Abdennour.

Weaknesses:

When a club is relying on Falcao as one of their main sources of goals, recent history tells us that you have a right to ask questions. Although El Tigre's pre-season form has been encouraging, aside from Valère Germain, Monaco have no plan B going forward. Guido Carrillo and Vagner Love were largely disappointing last season. At the back, Brazilian prospect Jemerson is having severe issues in terms of settling in to the grooves of French football, but the departures of Wallace and Ricardo Carvalho have left Jardim with little choice but to persevere. With the imminent departure of Joao Moutinho, Monaco's midfield base remains too thin to adequately juggle their European and domestic duties.

Verdict:

Since the Russian project at AS Monaco began, we have yet to see a campaign where the stars have aligned for the Principality side to fulfill its full potential. For 2016/2017 we remain unconvinced of Monaco's chances of achieving the latter goal. The broken promises on big spending continue to hang overhead at the Stade Louis II, with its bity crowds and disappointing attendance records embodying the idea that this venture is failing in every category apart from transfer revenues. If Jardim puts all his eggs in one basket, either a robust European campaign or challenging PSG for Ligue 1, then there might be success in 2017 for Les Monagesques. Otherwise and with more transfer window departures to come, anything other than a repeat of last season's results is unlikely.

PREDICTED POSITION: 3RD



AS MONACO

AS Monaco: Likely XI



AS Monaco: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	3rd	65
2014/2015	Ligue 1	3rd	71
2013/2014	Ligue 1	2nd	80
2012/2013	Ligue 2	1st	76
2011/2012	Ligue 2	8th	52

AS Monaco: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	B.Silva	7
2014/15	Ligue 1	B.Silva & A.Martial	9
2013/14	Ligue 1	E.Riviere	10
2012/13	Ligue 2	I. Toure	18
2011/12	Ligue 2	I. Toure	10

AS Monaco: Key Man

BERNARDO SILVA

After a breakthrough season in 2014/2015 and a 2015/2016 blighted by injuries, 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 rediscover that determination and desire that we saw from him when he first burst onto the Ligue 1 scene and match that with an even more refined pallet of technical ability, then Leonardo Jardim may once again be forced to change tactical setup to a 4-2-3-1, to best accommodate Bernardo Silva's talents.



AS NANCY

AS Nancy Lorraine: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Sergey Chernik	GK	Belorussian	28	2016/2017	BATE Borisov
Guy Ndy Assembé	GK	Cameroonian	30	2011/2012	FC Nantes
Alexandre Menay	GK	French	20	2016/2017	-
Vincent Muratori	LB	French	28	2012/2013	AS Monaco
Faitout Maouassa	LB	French	18	2015/2016	-
Tobias Badila	LB	French	23	2013/2014	-
Clément Lenglet	CB	French	21	2014/2015	-
Mickael Chretien	CB	Moroccan	32	2015/2016	RC Strasbourg
Modou Diagne	CB	Senegalese	22	2014/2015	-
Julien Cetout	RB	French	28	2014/2015	Tours FC
Joffrey Cuffaut	RB	French	28	2013/2014	Le Mans
Youssef Ait Bennasser*	DM	Moroccan	20	2016/2017	AS Monaco
Diallo Guidileye	DM	Mauritanian	26	2015/2016	AEL Limassol
Vincent Marchetti	DM	French	19	2016/2017	AC Ajaccio
Benoit Pedretti	CM	French	35	2015/2016	AC Ajaccio
Serge N'Guessan	CM	Ivorian	21	2016/2017	AFAD Djekanou
Loic Puyo	LW	French	27	2015/2016	US Orleans
Karim Coulibaly	LW	French	23	2013/2014	-
Anthony Robic	RW	French	30	2015/2016	Stade Lavallois
Christophe Mandanne	ST	French	31	2016/2017	Fujairah SC
Anthony Koura	ST	French	23	2016/2017	Nimes Olympique
Maurice Dale	ST	French	31	2014/2015	AC Arles Avignon
Youssef Hadji	ST	Moroccan	36	2014/2015	Elazigspor
Yann Mabella	ST	French	20	2016/2017	-
Romain Bauchet	ST	French	22	2014/2015	-
Pablo Correa	Manager	Uruguayan	49	2013/2014	Evian TG FC
Jacques Rousselot	President	French	68	1995/1996	-



AS NANCY

AS Nancy Lorraine: Squad Analysis

Patience and giving people multiple chances to achieve the aim that was initially set out for them are rare qualities for a President in modern football to have. Jacques Rousselot, who now appears vindicated in his decision-making, has validated these uncommon football ideals. He stuck with taskmaster Pablo Correa as manager despite a number of bids for promotion to Ligue 1 falling to the wayside at the death in consecutive Ligue 2 campaigns, before the Uruguayan proved it was a case of third time lucky in 2015/2016. Very much a man from another era, having celebrated a twentieth year at the head of his beloved Nancy last season, Rousselot is now hoping that his well-honed stability model succeeds in securing the club Ligue 1 longevity.

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. The midfield security that hotshot Youssef Ait Bennasser will provide cannot be underestimated, and Nancy can be chuffed to have secured him back on loan for this campaign, despite selling him to Monaco this summer. Elsewhere, Serge N'Guessan is an excellent, box-to-box, low cost and high potential pick up. At just 21, central defender Clement Lenglet was the most highly regarded player in Ligue 2 in his position last term. His decision to stay at Nancy personifies the club's principal ethos: progression and success through stability. In goal, Sergey Chernik is a significant upgrade on the often-calamitous Guy Ndy Assembe. However, the Belarus native will need a settling-in period to adapt to the sheer physicality that Ligue 1 matches demand goalkeepers to show in the box, especially during set-piece situations.

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 Nancy will face, during a campaign where they ideally need to hit the ground running. The lack of creative players in Nancy's ranks, especially in central midfield areas, is at best worrying. Benoit Pedretti has been known to come up with the odd mouth-watering goal from time to time, but at 35 is neither adequately fit nor agile to provide the reliable bridge between midfield and attack. In full-back areas, one cannot reproach the likes of Vincent Muratori and Julien Cetout for their optimistic, forward run-making, but one can be a little sceptical of their swashbuckling attempts to defend. The difference between Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 from a defensive aspect is not the physicality, but the necessity to focus at all times in the French top flight. So expect Nancy to struggle in wide areas defensively.

Verdict:

Pablo Correa's approach is unlikely to be dissimilar to Stephane Moulin's season: cover more ground and be more physical than the opponent at all costs. It worked for Angers, so why can't it work for ASNL? A lot depends on the young spine of the team delivering not just once in a while, but consistently. Lenglet, Ait Bennasser and Koura have enough raw ability and potential to not just turn heads in French football circles this season, but to make the rest of Europe take notice. It remains to be seen if they can deal with the pressures and added media exposure that come with Ligue 1 membership. Even if they do, an injury or two elsewhere in the team and Nancy are in serious hot water.

PREDICTED POSITION: 19TH



AS NANCY

AS Nancy Lorraine: Likely XI



AS Nancy Lorraine: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 2	1st	74
2014/2015	Ligue 2	5th	58
2013/2014	Ligue 2	4th	61
2012/2013	Ligue 1	18th	38
2011/2012	Ligue 1	11th	45

AS Nancy: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 2	A. Robic	10
2014/15	Ligue 2	Y. Hadji	14
2013/14	Ligue 2	Jeff Louis	12
2012/13	Ligue 1	S. Puygrenier	7
2011/12	Ligue 1	D. Niculae	6

AS Nancy Lorraine: Key Man

ANTHONY KOURA

Nancy took a chance in signing Anthony Koura, even if the 23 year old was one of Ligue 2's most promising strikers last term.

The former Nimes man had consistent back injuries in 2015/2016 and it is unclear whether Koura will be able to return to anything close to his pre-layoff form.

But if he does, then Correa has grabbed himself a potential talisman in attack, a weapon that is so potent when in form that Koura has the potential at the age of 23 to be the decisive factor between a Ligue 1 relegation dogfight and lower-mid table security.

Koura's physical attributes should allow him to acclimatise to Ligue 1 in a more rapid fashion than others in his position who are also making the final step up in the French league hierarchy this summer.



ST. ETIENNE

AS Saint Etienne: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Stephane Ruffier	GK	French	29	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Jessy Moulin	GK	French	30	2011/2012	-
Anthony Maisonnial	GK	French	18	2016/2017	-
Pierre-Yves Polomat	LB	French	22	2013/2014	-
Cheikh M'Bengue	LB	Senegalese	28	2016/2017	Stade Rennais
Florentin Pogba	CB	French	25	2012/2013	CS Sedan
Loic Perrin	CB	French	30	2003/2004	-
Kevin Malcuit	RB	French	24	2015/2016	Chamois Niortais
Kevin Theophile-Catherine	RB	French	26	2015/2016	Cardiff City
Ronaël Pierre-Gabriel	RB	French	18	2016/2017	-
Bryan Dabo	DM	French	24	2016/2017	Montpellier HSC
Jeremy Clement	CM	French	31	2011/2012	PSG
Ole Selnaes	CM	Norwegian	22	2015/2016	Rosenborg BK
Fabien Lemoine	CM	French	28	2011/2012	Stade Rennais
Vincent Pajot	CM	French	25	2015/2016	Stade Rennais
Benjamin Corgnet	AM	French	29	2013/2014	FC Lorient
Yohan Mollo	LW	French	27	2014/2015	AS Nancy Lorraine
Romain Hamouma	RW	French	29	2012/2013	SM Caen
Ousmane Tannane	RW	Moroccan	22	2015/2016	Heracles
Jonathan Bamba	RW	French	20	2015/2016	-
Kevin Monnet-Paquet	RW/LW	French	27	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Nolan Roux	ST	French	28	2015/2016	Lille OSC
Robert Beric	ST	Slovenian	25	2015/2016	Rapid Vienna
Alexander Soderlund	ST	Norwegian	28	2015/2016	Rosenborg BK
Christophe Galtier	Manager	French	49	2009/2010	Aris Salonika
Bernard Caiazza	President	French	62	2009/2010	-
Roland Romeyer	President	French	70	2010/2011	-



ST. ETIENNE

AS Saint Etienne: Squad Analysis

Continuity is king for St Étienne. However, their steadiness does not make them exciting to watch. The enigmatic Christophe Galtier secured St Étienne yet another top five finish last season, giving Les Verts another shot at Europa League qualification for 2016/2017. Relying on a tight-knit squad and an uninspiring 4-3-3 formation, Galtier has managed to perfect the formula for moderate, consistent success in Ligue 1. Each year, St Étienne's squad becomes thinner in appearance, and yet Galtier somehow still pulls off a top five finish. After coming so close to making substantial headway in the Europa League last season, only to be put to the sword by Basel in the final seconds of the first knockout round, ASSE fans will hope that they can make serious inroads into Europe's secondary competition this campaign.

Strengths:

As previously mentioned, manager Christophe Galtier subscribes to the theory that it is the end result that is most important and not the way in which you seek to achieve it. The manager aside, there are a small handful of players who, each season, elevate Les Verts from being just another member of the Ligue 1 mid-table pack. Goalkeeper Stéphane Ruffier continues to prove his worth as an impressive and ruthlessly efficient force between the sticks, whilst also showcasing last season that he has almost entirely cut out the odd howling error that previously crept into his game from time to time. In the signing of Bryan Dabo, St Étienne have captured one of Ligue 1's most versatile and propitious talents. Also in the transfers department, we can begin to expect more from Norwegian pair Alexander Soderlund and Ole Selnaes, who have now had half a year to familiarise themselves with their new surroundings.

Weaknesses:

St Étienne's attacking options are largely uninspiring, save for winger Romain Hamouma, who remains one of Ligue 1's most underrated talents. On the up side, big striker and unit Robert Beric looked briefly promising last season before suffering a cruel injury – it remains unclear if his game will fully recover. Nolan Roux and Kevin Monnet Paquet on the other hand are simply not cut out for a side aiming to rub shoulders with the upper echelons of Ligue 1. There is also a distinct lack of creativity in midfield for Les Verts, with Benjamin Corgnet so far failing miserably to recapture his FC Lorient form.

Verdict:

Much work needs to be done in the month of August in the transfer market in order for Galtier to accumulate enough strength in depth to be able to cope with the grueling demands set by the mixture of Thursday night Europa League action and the weekend's domestic duties. The squad is also so utterly devoid of inspiration and creativity in midfield that realistically only a repeat of last season's modest achievements, attaining a position in the league table that affords them a shot at Europa League qualification without shining in the competition once they get there, can be attained.

PREDICTED POSITION: 5TH



ST. ETIENNE

AS Saint Etienne: Likely XI



AS Saint Etienne: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	6th	58
2014/2015	Ligue 1	5th	69
2013/2014	Ligue 1	4th	69
2012/2013	Ligue 1	5th	63
2011/2012	Ligue 1	7th	57

AS Saint Etienne: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	Nolan Roux	9
2014/15	Ligue 1	Max Gradel	17
2013/14	Ligue 1	Romain Hamouma	9
2012/13	Ligue 1	P-E.A	18
2011/12	Ligue 1	P-E.A	10

AS Saint Etienne: 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.

He will have felt aggrieved not to receive a call up to the French national team this summer, especially considering the defensive injury crisis that Les Bleus suffered. His game-reading & ball-winning abilities, paralleled with his tranquility under pressure, provide the necessary stability at the back for Les Verts.

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.

His bad luck with injuries last season really hurt St Étienne, and it was no coincidence that Les Verts's late upturn in form in 2015/2016 coincided with Perrin's return to fitness.



DIJON FCO

Dijon FCO: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Baptiste Reynet	GK	French	25	2015/2016	FC Lorient
Benjamin Leroy	GK	French	27	2016/2017	Evian TG FC
Arnold Bouka Moutou	LB	Congolese	27	2016/2017	Angers SCO
Quentin Bernard	LB	French	27	2015/2016	Chamois Niortais
Yunis Abdelhamid	CB	Moroccan	28	2016/2017	Valenciennes FC
Jordan Loties	CB	French	32	2015/2016	CA Osasuna
Cedric Varrault	CB	French	36	2011/2012	Panionios
Foued Chafik	RB	Moroccan	29	2016/2017	Stade Lavallois
Vincent Rufli	RB	Swiss	28	2016/2017	FC Sion
Valentin Rosier	RB	French	19	2016/2017	Rodez AF
Jordan Marie	DM	French	24	2013/2014	-
Guillaume Sarrabayrouse	DM	French	19	2016/2017	US Colomiers
Johan Gastien	CM	French	28	2013/2014	Chamois Niortais
Florent Balmont	CM	French	36	2016/2017	LOSC Lille
Anthony Belmonte	CM	French	20	2015/2016	FC Istres
Frederic Sammaritano	LW	French	30	2015/2016	AJ Auxerre
Marvin Martin	AM	French	28	2016/2017	LOSC Lille
Dylan Bahamboula*	AM	French	21	2016/2017	AS Monaco
Pierre Lees Melou	AM	French	23	2015/2016	Lege Cap-Ferret
Jeremie Bela	RW	French	23	2014/2015	RC Lens
Romain Amalfitano	RW/LW	French	26	2014/2015	Dijon FCO
Julio Tavares	ST	Cape Verdean	27	2012/2013	Bourg-Peronnas
Lois Diony	ST/RW	French	23	2014/2015	Stade Montois
Yohann Riviere	ST	French	31	2014/2015	Havre AC
Olivier Dall'Oglio	Manager	French	52	2012/2013	Olympique Ales
Olivier Declourt	President	French	49	2012/2013	-



DIJON FCO

Dijon FCO: Squad Analysis

As one of the most attractive sides to watch in Ligue 2 last season, it would be unfair to suggest that Dijon do not deserve their shot at the big time. The summer has seen the side focus on adding experience in midfield, notably through the arrivals of former Lille duo Marvin Martin and Florent Balmont. Manager Olivier Dall'Oglio has for the most part decided to entrust the flair players upfront that fared so well in the second division with leading the line in Ligue 1. Although such a policy is admirable, it is incredibly risky and could ultimately result in the club's top-flight stay being limited to a single season.

Strengths:

It is important to reiterate just to what an extent Dijon were the second division's eye candy last season. Dijon's frontman Julio Tavares is the definition of Ligue 2 goal-scoring consistency, having got into double figures three times out of the last four campaigns. Don't let his cheeky, larger-than-life personality fool you into thinking he is somehow not hard working. Tavares is a physically domineering, fox-in-the-box type of attacker who will sometimes display moments of technical brilliance. His chance conversion rate is however a worry by Ligue 1 standards. The signing of Dylan Babamboula on loan from AS Monaco will add to the direct, fast and physical approach to formulating chances that Dijon adopted in Ligue 2. Florent Balmont adds much needed top flight experience, which will be essential to Dijon in both on and off pitch situations. Much like Balmont, manager Dall'Oglio is a pragmatic and clever operator who will not refuse to sacrifice style of play and switch to a Plan B for points contrary to what ESTAC Troyes appeared to do initially last season.

Weaknesses:

The punt on forgotten man and central midfielder Marvin Martin looks more like a miscalculated risk, but only time will tell if he can recapture the form that led him being compared to Zinedine Zidane in the formative stages of his career. Dijon's inability to secure Christopher Julien at centre back permanently is perhaps the most significant moment in their summer transfer policy to date, even if with the free transfer of Yunis Abdelhamid they have at least one central defender of Ligue 1 quality. Otherwise, across the defence there is a genuine lack of ability, and some of the signings they have made in that department, notably that of Arnold Bouka Moutou from Angers, leave a bad taste in the mouth. The decision to continue to play 36 year old captain Cedric Varrault as a reward for Ligue 1 promotion is possibly suicidal. Make no mistake, this is going to be an uphill battle from the very start for Dijon.

Verdict:

Nobody is ever destined for relegation, but Dijon arguably have the greatest mountain to climb when compared with their nineteen other sets of colleagues in the division. A frail defence, general lack of collective Ligue 1 experience and little to no funds to rectify their situation, we can only wish Olivier Dall'Oglio the very best for what is set to be a grueling campaign. His gutsy approach might however stun opposition sufficiently to dodge relegation.

PREDICTED POSITION: 17TH



DIJON FCO

Dijon FCO: Likely XI



Dijon FCO: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 2	2nd	70
2014/2015	Ligue 2	4th	61
2013/2014	Ligue 2	6th	57
2012/2013	Ligue 2	7th	59
2011/2012	Ligue 1	19th	36

Dijon FCO: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 2	L.Diony & J.Tavares	11
2014/15	Ligue 2	J.Tavares	10
2013/14	Ligue 2	J.Gastien & R.Philippote aux	7
2012/13	Ligue 2	J.Tavares	10
2011/12	Ligue 1	B.Jovial	9

Dijon FCO: Key Man

BAPTISTE REYNET

25 year old Reynet made the bold decision to leave his position as FC Lorient's second choice goalkeeper for Ligue 2 football in 2014.

We have already underlined Dijon's defensive deficiencies. If there is one man to successfully counteract the abovementioned flaws, then it has to be the French shot-stopper.

His biggest weaknesses revolve around his sometimes-lackadaisical approach to ball distribution, but his agility, focus and body shape when it comes to making saves was arguably unparalleled in Ligue 2 last term.

The goalkeeper is the last line of defence for any outfit; Dijon's Reynet has the ability to make an enormous difference week-in, week-out.

EA Guingamp: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Theo Guivarch	GK	French	20	2015/2016	-
Romain Salin	GK	French	32	2016/2017	Maritimo
Karl-Johan Johnsson	GK	Swedish	26	2016/2017	Randers FC
Reynald Lemaitre	LB	French	33	2012/2013	AS Nancy Lorraine
Dorian Leveque	LB	French	26	2010/2011	Boulogne sur Mer
Jeremy Sorbon	CB	French	32	2013/2014	SM Caen
Benjamin Angoua	CB	Ivorian	29	2014/2015	Valenciennes FC
Christophe Kerbrat	CB	French	29	2011/2012	Plabennec
Jordan Ikoko	RB	French	22	2016/2017	PSG
Jonathan Martins Pereira	RB	French	30	2015/2016	ESTAC Troyes
Baissama Sankoh	RB	Guinean	24	2015/2016	Stade Brestois 29
Mustapha Diallo	DM	Senegalese	30	2009/2010	ASC Diaraf
Lucas Deaux	DM	French	27	2016/2017	KAA Gent
Ludovic Blas	CM/RW	French	18	2015/2016	-
Etienne Didot	CM	French	33	2016/2017	Toulouse FC
Yannis Salibur	LW	French	25	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Thibault Giresse	LW	French	35	2009/2010	Toulouse FC
Nicolas Benezet	LW	French	25	2015/2016	Evian TG FC
Nill De Pauw	RW	Belgian	26	2015/2016	Lokeren
Marcus Coco	RW	French	20	2014/2015	-
Jimmy Briand	ST	French	30	2015/2016	Hannover 96
Sloan Privat	ST	French	27	2015/2016	Gent
Ronnie Schwartz	ST	Danish	26	2015/2016	Brøndby IF
Alexandre Mendy	ST	French	22	2016/2017	OGC Nice
Antoine Kombouare	Manager	French	52	2016/2017	RC Lens
Bertrand Desplat	President	French	46	2010/2011	-



GUINGAMP

EA Guingamp: Squad Analysis

The first weekend of the new Ligue 1 season will be quite a poignant moment for pint-sized, Brittany-based EA Guingamp. As for the first time in five years, the name of the man in the dugout marshaling the Guingamp troops is not Jocelyn Gourvennec. Widely regarded as one of the most talented managers on the French football circuit, Gourvennec produced yearly miracles in ensuring the survival of the club in Ligue 1 for three consecutive seasons, despite the fact that at the beginning of each season, Guingamp on paper appeared to have one of the weakest squads in the division. When you consider that Guingamp won the Coupe de France and progressed to the knockout rounds of the Europa League during Gourvennec's tenure, you begin to understand the sheer enormity of the feat that the technician achieved. Now, a new chapter in the tractor town's story begins. Under the leadership of the equally excellent Antoine Kombouare, a manager with vast Ligue 1 experience and a proven track record of developing young talent, Guingamp will seek to make it five straight seasons in the French top flight.

Strengths:

Antoine Kombouare's first alteration to the existing set-up was to bring in a midfield. That is right, previously one did not really exist, with Gourvennec's sides conceding territory in rapid fashion and generally operating on the counter. This adjustment will allow Guingamp to control certain fixtures a little more, which is a tactic that subsequently works to encourage the players to be more confident in possession of the ball. Newly brought in Ligue 1 experience-filled duo Etienne Didot and Lucas Deaux will be key in implementing the change in philosophy. The signing of Alexandre Mendy upfront is an exciting one from a Guingamp perspective, as it hands the club one of Ligue 1's physically strongest and most promising centre forwards, even if his composure in front of goal is currently a little non-existent.

Weaknesses:

The reality of Guingamp's squad at the moment is, to put it bluntly, bleak. Kombouaré is going to need his tactical nous and man-management abilities in abundance if Guingamp are to exact any form of success from this Ligue 1 campaign. Kombouaré's strongest suit is his talent in unearthing youngsters with potential and giving them the conditions and playing time to fulfill his usually high expectations of them. But Guingamp have relatively few individuals to be unearthed, especially in defensive areas. The starting back four is one of the weakest in the division: between red card fanatic Benjamin Angoua and the well-intentioned but fundamentally slow Christophe Kerbrat, the defensive situation is uncomfortable at best. Not to mention that EAG have lost the show stopping, sometimes erratic, but often brilliant Jonas Lossil between the sticks.

Verdict:

Antoine Kombouare has never shied away from a challenge, his undertaking of the impossible task of keeping RC Lens afloat in Ligue 1 during the 2014/2015 campaign is a testament to the fact. However this squad cannot be expected to do anything other than fight bravely in another top-flight relegation dogfight. Gourvennec had the magic touch in sticky situations previously, does Kombouare?

PREDICTED POSITION: 14TH

EA Guingamp: Likely XI



EA Guingamp: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	16th	44
2014/2015	Ligue 1	10th	49
2013/2014	Ligue 1	16th	42
2012/2013	Ligue 2	2nd	70
2011/2012	Ligue 2	7th	55

EA Guingamp: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	J.Briand, Y.Salibur & S.Privat	7
2014/15	Ligue 1	C.Beauvue	17
2013/14	Ligue 1	M.Yatabare	11
2012/13	Ligue 2	M.Yatabare	22
2011/12	Ligue 2	A.Knockaert	11

EA Guingamp: Key Man

NICOLAS BENEZET

Flitting in and out of the Guingamp setup last season for a multitude of reasons including injury (the reason for his absence at the start of this campaign), lengthy suspensions and tactical switches, on his day French winger Nicolas Benezet is destructively creative.

A quick-minded, versatile individual who can play on both sides of the pitch, Benezet has oftentimes produced moments of inspiration with an exceptional shot or a side-splitting pass that have fundamentally determined the results of Guingamp's more tight-fisted affairs.

Although he is best known in Ligue 1 circles for the odd screamer, we must not forget that he was one of the lead assist providers during his time in Ligue 2 with Nimes. He continues to improve his crossing ability and you can expect Benezet to be an offensive fulcrum for Kombouaré's men during this campaign, should he remain disciplined in training.



FC LORIENT

FC Lorient: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Benjamin Lecomte	GK	French	25	2010/2011	-
Anthony Lamonge	GK	French	20	2016/2017	-
Paul Delecroix	GK	French	27	2016/2017	Chamois Niortais
Bradley Mazikou	LB	French	20	2016/2017	-
Vincent Le Goff	LB	French	26	2014/2015	Istres
Lindsay Rose	CB	French	24	2016/2017	Olympique Lyonnais
Francois Bellugou	CB	French	28	2014/2015	AS Nancy
Wesley Lautoa	CB	French	27	2011/2012	CS Sedan
Yohann Wachter	CB	French	24	2013/2014	-
Abdou Pape Paye	RB	French	26	2015/2016	Dijon FCO
Faiz Selemani	RB	French	22	2016/2017	Chamois Niortais
Rafidine Abdullah	CM	French	22	2013/2014	Marseille
Cafu	CM	Portuguese	23	2016/2017	Vitoria Guimaraes
Didier Ndong	CM	Gabonese	22	2014/2015	CS Sfax
Walid Mesloub	AM	Algerian	30	2014/2015	Havre AC
Maxime Barthelme	LW	French	27	2010/2011	RC Paris
Romain Philippoteaux	LW	French	28	2014/2015	Dijon FCO
Sylvain Marveaux	LW	French	30	2016/2017	Newcastle United
Jimmy Cabot	LW	French	22	2015/2016	ESTAC Troyes
Issam Ben Khemis	RW	French	20	2016/2017	-
Benjamin Moukandjo	ST	Cameroonian	27	2015/2016	Stade de Reims
Moryké Fofana	ST/LW	Ivorian	24	2015/2016	Lillestrom
Benjamin Jeannot	ST	French	24	2014/2015	AS Nancy
Majeed Waris	ST	Ghanaian	24	2015/2016	Trabzonspor
Sylvain Ripoll	Manager	French	44	2014/2015	-
Loic Fery	President	French	42	2009/2010	-



FC LORIENT

FC Lorient: Squad Analysis

There is little doubt that Sylvain Ripoll's first full season at the helm was disappointing for all those concerned with FC Lorient in 2015/2016. Even though the campaign started with promise, with free-scoring Benjamin Moukandjo appearing unstoppable at times and handing Les Merlus a reliable attacking platform that appeared likely to propel them to an upper-mid-table finish, they effectively stammered over the Ligue 1 finishing line, avoiding a nasty relegation battle by the tightest of margins in the process.

Strengths:

Due to injuries and suspensions, Lorient did not get the opportunity to consistently play Benjamin Moukandjo and Majeed Waris alongside each other in Ripoll's 4-4-2 last season. Both are blessed with pace, power and a striker's swagger that is rarely seen in Ligue 1. All being well they can build a salivating partnership this season. With this summer's transfer policy to date, Lorient have attempted to improve the spine of the team. The signing of Cafu from Portugal provides the talented if not technically-challenged Didier Ndong with a robust partner in defensive midfield areas, giving Lorient the courage and the necessary structure to operate with a gutsy 4-2-4, at least on the counter. In signing Jimmy Cabot from ESTAC Troyes last January, Les Merlus have one of the best wide talents in the division and much will be expected for him at his first full season at the club.

Weaknesses:

The loss of Lamine Kone to Sunderland last January was enormous for Lorient, make no mistake. When you combine that with the departure of Lamine Gassama and Raphael Guerreiro, Les Merlus's defence is considerably worse off heading into the new season. The signing of Lindsay Rose on a permanent deal from Lyon could prove to be astute business but their remains a question mark over whether he will ever recapture his Valenciennes form after several unfortunate injuries. One would also be justified in questioning the extent to which Lorient have strength in depth, especially in the centre of the park. Sylvain Ripoll has so far failed to live up to his predecessor in Christian Gourcuff both in terms of results and attractiveness of play. For Ripoll, this is likely to be a defining season, not just in terms of his future job prospects at Lorient, but anywhere else in French football.

Verdict:

Ripoll must first produce a clear philosophy, one that he is fundamentally happy with himself, and then present it to his players accordingly, something that did not appear to successfully happen last season. This squad is talented enough to finish in the top half of the Ligue 1 table, but much depends on the conclusion of the transfer window in terms of possible departures and a coherent game-plan from the coaching staff.

PREDICTED POSITION: 13TH



FC LORIENT

FC Lorient: Likely XI



FC Lorient: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	15th	46
2014/2015	Ligue 1	16th	43
2013/2014	Ligue 1	8th	49
2012/2013	Ligue 1	8th	53
2011/2012	Ligue 1	17th	39

FC Lorient: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	Benjamin Moukandjo	13
2014/15	Ligue 1	J. Ayew	12
2013/14	Ligue 1	Vincent Aboubakar	16
2012/13	Ligue 2	J. Aliadiere	15
2011/12	Ligue 2	K. Monnet-Paquet	6

FC Lorient: Key Man



The 30-year-old Algerian international waited a long time, until 2014 in fact, before he could display his talent on French football's finest stage. His trickery and eye for a pass in the advanced midfield role that he inhabits are so fundamental to the attacking success of this Lorient side. Due to the player's positioning, Mesloub acts as the bridge between midfield and attack and has proved to be an important assist-producer in his first two seasons with the club.

On top of that, Mesloub also possesses the ability and the perceptiveness to add the odd goal of his own from time to time, even if this was a trait that was more apparent during his time at Le Havre than it has been so far at Lorient. Les Merlus will continue to rely on counter-attacking football this season and Mesloub will play a pivotal role in successfully implementing this tactic. However, with his contract expiring in 2017, having rejected an extension offer and reportedly wanting out of the club, Mesloub might not be best disposed to give his all for Lorient this season, at least in the early stages of the campaign.



FC NANTES

FC Nantes: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Remy Riou	GK	French	28	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Maxime Dupe	GK	French	23	2011/2012	-
Alexandre Olliero	GK	French	20	2016/2017	-
Lucas Lima	LB	Brazilian	24	2016/2017	Arouca
Wilifried Moimbe	LB	French	27	2015/2016	Stade Brestois
Diego Carlos	CB	Brazilian	23	2016/2017	Estoril
Oswaldo Vizcarrondo	CB	Venezuelan	32	2013/2014	Lanus
Koffi Djidji	CB	French	23	2011/2012	-
Lorik Cana	CB	Albanian	33	2015/2016	Lazio
Léo Dubois	RB	French	21	2015/2016	-
Guillaume Gillet	DM	Belgian	32	2015/2016	RSC Anderlecht
Abdoulaye Toure	DM	French	22	2012/2013	-
Valentin Rongier	DM	French	21	2015/2016	-
Adrien Thomasson	CM	French	22	2015/2016	Evian TG FC
Amine Harit	AM	French	19	2016/2017	-
Alexander Kacaniklic	LW	Swedish	24	2016/2017	Fulham FC
Nicolaj Thomsen	LW	Danish	23	2016/2017	Aalborg BK
Alexis Alegue	LW	French	19	2015/2016	-
Jules Iloki	RW	French	24	2015/2016	-
Kolbeinn Sigthorsson	ST	Icelandic	26	2015/2016	Ajax
Yacine Bammou	ST	French	24	2014/2015	-
Fernando Aristeguieta	ST	Venezuelan	24	2013/2014	Caracas FC
Emiliano Sala	ST	Argentinian	25	2015/2016	Bordeaux
Rene Girard	Manager	French	62	2016/2017	LOSC Lille
Waldemar Kita	President	Polish	63	2007/2008	FC Lausanne



FC NANTES

FC Nantes: Squad Analysis

New season, new manager, but Nantes are set to incur the same problems that have blighted their desired progression from mid-table fodder to top ten finishers in the last three campaigns. The appointment of the defensive specialist Rene Girard, which occurred only once Christian Gourcuff had rejected Nantes, was badly received by the Les Canaris faithful. Girard's style of play bored Ligue 1 partisans to death when he was at Lille and the decision to appoint him by the Nantes ownership is in a view to French top flight stability more than anything else: a choice that lacks courage and that does not address the side's inability to score goals. What is done is done and admittedly there are some incredibly talented youngsters within the squad who have the potential to break through onto the radar European football's elite in a major way during this campaign.

Strengths:

Michel der Zakarian will go down in Nantes history as a successful manager, a man responsible for the club's promotion to the top flight and their sustention there despite the tricky working conditions the Armenian had to deal with: notably, a transfer embargo and a frankly erratic board. Der Zakarian proved to be one of the most tactically versatile coaches in Ligue 1, adapting 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. As a result, der Zakarian has left behind a hungry and energized squad with a great range of experience in terms of different tactical setups and situations, both as a collective but also as individuals in a variety of positions. Since the departure of Papy Djilobodji, Nantes struggled to maintain solidity at the back; Girard's skillset can combat that problem. Koffi Djidji is one of the most promising central defenders in the division. He is not the only exciting prospect at Nantes: there are talents across the playing squad hoping for consistent playing time this season. Amine Harit, Valentin Rongier and Alexis Alegue have the potential to begin a mini-golden age for Nantes.

Weaknesses:

FC Nantes have followed a trend started by OGC Nice in recent transfer windows by using Portugal as the source for most of their transfer activity so far, notably at centre back (Diego Carlos) and at left back (Lucas Lima). Although both individuals arrive in France with praise from the Portuguese media, neither speak any French and the adaptation period to the physical French top flight will take a minimum of six months. In such crucial positions and with Girard having designs on implementing their pair in his starting XI immediately, Nantes appear to be in for a ropey start to the season. The other major flaw is the lack of a successful goalscorer. The fact that their top-scorer last season, Emiliano Sala, grabbed just six goals, is testament not only to Nantes' difficulties in front of the opposition's goal but also in the general lack of quality of their previous attacking unit to procure a steady stream of chances match after match. Kolbeinn Sigthorsson might have shone for Iceland at EURO 2016 but was one of Ligue 1's worst players in the 2015/16 campaign.

Verdict:

Rene Girard is no fool. He knows that no matter what age you are or what stage of your career you have reached, as a manager you can always learn something. Expect him to be braver with his tactics than he was at Lille and for Nantes to surprise many.

PREDICTED POSITION: 7TH



FC NANTES

FC Nantes: Likely XI



FC Nantes: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	14th	48
2014/2015	Ligue 1	14th	45
2013/2014	Ligue 1	13th	46
2012/2013	Ligue 2	3rd	69
2011/2012	Ligue 2	9th	51

FC Nantes: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	E. Sala	6
2014/15	Ligue 1	J. Veretout	7
2013/14	Ligue 1	F. Djordjevic	9
2012/13	Ligue 2	F. Djordjevic	20
2011/12	Ligue 2	S. Wiltord	8

FC Nantes: Key Man

GUILLAUME GILLET

Bursting onto the Ligue 1 scene during the 2014/2015 campaign on loan at SC Bastia, Nantes did excellent January business to prise Guillaume Gillet away from Anderlecht permanently.

His experienced head in and amongst a squad that is generally typified by its youthful exuberance mean that he will not only have an important role to play as the deeper midfielder on a personal note but also in an on and off pitch advisory role to the emerging talent around him.

Gillet must ensure that he continues to harbour a desire to burst forward when appropriate, despite the fact that he has very much entered the final stages of his career.

It is vital that the interchanges in midfield are as rapid as possible for Nantes this season.



FC METZ

FC Metz: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Thomas Didillon	GK	French	20	2013/2014	-
Eiji Kawashima	GK	Japanese	26	2016/2017	Dundee United
David Oberhauser	GK	French	26	2014/2015	UTA Atad
Franck Signorino	LB	French	34	2016/2017	Stade de Reims
Matthieu Udol	LB	French	20	2015/2016	-
Simon Falette	CB	French	24	2016/2017	Stade Brestois
Guido Milan	CB	Argentinian	29	2012/2013	CA Atlanta
Vahid Selimovic	CB	Luxembourgian	19	2016/2017	-
Ivan Balliu	RB	Spanish	24	2015/2016	Arouca
Jonathan Rivierez	RB	French	27	2014/2015	Havre AC
Cheick Doucoure	DM	Ivorian	23	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Georges Mandjeck	DM	Cameroonian	27	2015/2016	Kayseri Erciyesspor
Chris Philipps	DM	Luxembourgian	22	2015/2016	-
Renaud Cohade	CM	French	31	2016/2017	AS Saint Etienne
Florent Mollet	CM	French	24	2016/2017	US Creteil
Alexis Larriere	CM	French	19	2016/2017	-
Vincent Thill	AM	Luxembourgian	16	2016/2017	-
Janis Ikaunieks	AM	Latvian	21	2015/2016	FK Liepaja
Fadil Sido	LW/RW	Burkinabe	23	2014/2015	Le Mans
Kevin Lejeune	LW	French	31	2012/2013	FC Tours
Ismaila Sarr	LW	Senegalese	18	2016/2017	Generation Foot
Yann Jouffre	RW	French	32	2016/2017	FC Lorient
Opa Nguette	RW/ST	French	22	2016/2017	Valenciennes FC
Mevlut Erding*	ST	Turkish	29	2016/2017	Hannover 96
Habib Diallo	ST	Senegalese	21	2015/2016	-
Kwame Nsor	ST	Ghanaian	24	2013/2014	FC Kaiserslautern
Thibaut Vion	ST	French	22	2014/2015	FC Porto
Gauthier Hein	ST	French	20	2016/2017	-
Philippe Hinschberger	Manager	French	42	2015/2016	US Creteil
Bernard Serin	President	French	65	2009/2010	-



FC METZ

FC Metz: Squad Analysis

There has quite literally never been a more last-minute promotion in French football history. FC Metz grabbed the final promotion spot of three in Ligue 2 last season after beating Le Havre not on points (65 each), not even on goal difference (+15 each), but on goals scored, with Metz having put 54 balls in the back of the net over the course of the season, whilst Le Havre had managed just two less. Metz however will not allow the rather cheeky manner in which they achieved promotion in May to affect their confidence going into the new Ligue 1 season. They achieved an instant return to the top flight, not a feat that is often achieved in the world of French football. There is rightly a feeling of optimism that Les Grenats have a concoction of voracious youth and proven Ligue 1 experience to make a successful stab of rubbing shoulders with the big boys for more than just a solitary campaign this time around.

Strengths:

Having players at your disposal with sufficient experience and a proven success rate with coping with the terrifying physicality of Ligue 1 is possibly the biggest single secret to surviving a relegation battle as a newly promoted side. In Renaud Cohade, Metz have a midfield marshal; in Franck Signorino, a cautious operator who has retained his defensive capabilities despite the ageing process; and in Yann Jouffre, a tireless workhorse with a frame that tricks defenders into underestimating his capabilities, utterly to their own detriment. All three are fruits of Metz's summer transfer policy's labour. Unless they suffer long-term injuries (Signorino already a doubt), it is these players who have the capability to keep the team structured in a way to maximize Metz's points tally this season.

Weaknesses:

Metz have internally already factored in the arrival of another central defender, and boy do they need it. Simon Fallette is an excellent pick up from Brest. He is one of France's most promising defensive prospects who stands out because he has the intelligence necessary to most efficiently use the natural pace and power that he has been gifted. But there is a distinct lack of a viable partner for him heading into the new campaign. Some form of attacking reinforcement is also imperative. Mevlut Erding, who has joined from Hannover on loan, is considered as one of the most consistently underwhelming strikers to have graced Ligue 1 with his presence in the last half-decade and simply will not supply the goals that Metz need in order to prolong their top flight stay.

Verdict:

We are often conservative when making predictions at this stage of the season, when there is still a large amount of crucial window-shopping to be done. There is no doubt that Metz have considerable work to do in that department, but with an additional defender and centre forward, they are perhaps better initially equipped than the other promoted sides to hold their own.

PREDICTED POSITION: 20TH



FC METZ

FC Metz: Likely XI



FC Metz: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 2	3rd	65
2014/2015	Ligue 1	19th	30
2013/2014	Ligue 2	1st	76
2012/2013	National	2nd	70
2011/2012	Ligue 2	18th	42

FC Metz: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 2	Yeni Ngbakoto	12
2014/15	Ligue 1	Modibo Maiga	9
2013/14	Ligue 2	Diafra Sakho	20
2012/13	National	Diafra Sakho	23
2011/12	Ligue 2	Mathieu Duhamel	10

FC Metz: Key Man

RENAUD COHADE

Fed up with being regularly tossed onto the sidelines at Saint Etienne, Cohade must be commended for his brave move to the weaker FC Metz.

The Frenchman was rarely given enough credit for his contributions with Les Verts and he presents Les Grenats with a surprisingly complete skillset in midfield.

Willing to put in the defensive legwork when necessary, Cohade is likely to be used for his passing ability and creativity in a three man midfield in Metz's preferred 4-3-3 formation.

This, combined with his experience, should enable Metz to efficiently use the possession that they receive when Cheikh Doucoure successfully wrestles the ball away from the opponent.



BORDEAUX

Girondins de Bordeaux: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Cedric Carrasso	GK	French	34	2009/2010	Toulouse FC
Jerome Prior	GK	French	20	2014/2015	-
Paul Bernardoni	GK	French	19	2016/2017	ESTAC Troyes
Maxime Poundje	LB	French	23	2011/2012	-
Diego Contento	LB	German	26	2014/2015	Bayern Munich
Theo Pellenard	LB	French	22	2014/2015	-
Nicolas Pallois	CB	French	28	2014/2015	Chamois Niortais
Pablo	CB	Brazilian	25	2015/2016	Ponte Preta
Frederic Guilbert	CB	French	20	2015/2016	-
Milan Gajic	RB	Serbian	19	2015/2016	OFK Belgrade
Youssef Sabaly*	RB	French	23	2016/2017	PSG
Jeremy Toulalan	DM	French	32	2016/2017	AS Monaco
Mauro Arambarri	DM	Uruguayan	20	2015/2016	Defensor
Jaroslav Plasil	CM	Czech	34	2009/2010	Osasuna
Gregory Sertic	CM	Croatian	27	2010/2011	-
Abdou Traore	CM	Malian	28	2008/2009	-
Valentin Vada	CM	Argentinian	20	2014/2015	-
Adam Ounas	AM	French	19	2015/2016	-
Younes Kaabouni	AM	French	21	2013/2014	-
Malcom	LW	Brazilian	19	2015/2016	Corinthians
Nicolas Maurice-Belay	LW	French	31	2011/2012	FC Sochaux
Francois Kamano	RW/ST	Guinean	20	2016/2017	SC Bastia
Diego Rolan	ST	Uruguayan	23	2012/2013	Defensor
Issac Kiese Thelin	ST	Swedish	24	2014/2015	Malmö FF
Gaetan Laborde	ST	French	22	2013/2014	-
Jeremy Menez	ST	French	29	2016/2017	AC Milan
Thomas Toure	ST/RW	French	22	2014/2015	-
Jocelyn Gourvennec	Manager	French	44	2016/2017	EA Guingamp
Jean Louis Tiraud	President	French	64	1996/1997	-



BORDEAUX

Girondins de Bordeaux: Squad Analysis

For the first time since May 2010 and Laurent Blanc, Bordeaux have a manager at the head of their club who has the ability to bring success. Jocelyn Gourvennec worked wonder after wonder at EA Guingamp with limited funds and his appointment by President Jean Louis Triaud at the head of Les Girondins can only be described as a masterstroke. Marseille are remembered as the biggest failures of the 2015/2016 Ligue 1 campaign in terms of expectations versus reality, but Bordeaux were a close second. Willy Sagnol attempted to discover his best team not through a series of intelligent decisions. Instead, he stumbled through his duties, identifying two or three key players and forcing the rest to work around them. The result was that Bordeaux were not a team for much of 2015/16. His lack of club managerial experience cost him in every department and interim boss Ulrich Rame was just as uninspiring. A page is turning for Bordeaux; consistent top five finishes are the aim.

Strengths:

Bordeaux possess one of the most dangerous collections of attacking players in Ligue 1 heading into the new season. Adam Ounas's talent became evident for all to see last season and the Franco-Algerian attacker's name already features on the shortlists of many of Europe's elite. Nicolas Maurice Belay continues to be one of Ligue 1's most underrated properties, whilst the addition of Jeremy Menez brings a big-name attacker to the club, who has a character and the technical ability to excite the Bordeaux faithful considerably. The signing of frankly timeless midfielder Jeremy Toulalan brings a father-figure into the squad and makes the settling in process for manager Gourvennec that little bit easier, as he brings a natural leader into the dressing room with him. Bordeaux have also done well to quickly rid of undesirable characters like Lamine Sane and Andre Poko, who contributed to the stale atmosphere around the club last season.

Weaknesses:

Bordeaux's decision to recruit Paul Bernardoni last January has created friction amongst the goalkeeping hierarchy at the club, as previous number one Cedric Carrasso has alluded to in a recent interview. The only major area of weakness is at the heart of defence for Bordeaux. Nicolas Pallois has at times demonstrated the necessary quality to win battles against the league's toughest attackers, but his indiscipline oftentimes makes him a liability. Pallois's likely partner Pablo has so far struggled to adapt to the demands of the French top flight. Reinforcements in that area of the pitch would therefore be more than welcome. Up top, Gourvennec is almost too spoilt for choice, and will want to get a hierarchy sorted as quickly as possible to prevent too long an adjustment period.

Verdict:

Bordeaux have one of the most complete squads in the division. Without the distraction of European football and the beginning of a new era under Gourvennec, the 2016/2017 campaign poses to be an enthralling one for the Southwest side. A reinforcement or two at the back and the sky is the limit for Bordeaux.

PREDICTED POSITION: 4TH



BORDEAUX

Girondins de Bordeaux: Likely XI



Girondins de Bordeaux: Key Man



In several months time we will look back and realise that Bordeaux pulled off the coup of the summer transfer window with the signing of former French international Jeremy Menez, we are almost sure of it.

Granted, Menez has a bad boy image that resulted in a poor relationship with the PSG hierarchy during his days in Paris, but his talent remains undeniable. His sensational back-heeled goal during his time at AC Milan typifies the magic that he is capable of producing.

Bordeaux: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	11th	50
2014/2015	Ligue 1	6th	63
2013/2014	Ligue 1	7th	53
2012/2013	Ligue 1	7th	55
2011/2012	Ligue 1	5th	61

Bordeaux: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	C. Diabate	10
2014/15	Ligue 1	Diego Rolan	15
2013/14	Ligue 1	C. Diabate	15
2012/13	Ligue 1	H.Saivet , C.Diabate & Y.Gouffran	8
2011/12	Ligue 1	Y. Gouffran	14

At the age of 29 and looking at the example that Hatem Ben Arfa set last season by turning around a career that was on the rocks, Menez can light up Ligue 1.

He must however be incredibly motivated and willing to work just as hard as his teammates when Bordeaux do not have the ball: Gourvennec demands collective responsibility amongst his players and Menez must buy into this if he is to revive his career.



LILLE OSC

Lille OSC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Vincent Enyeama	GK	Nigerian	33	2012/2013	Hapoel Tel Aviv
Mike Maignan	GK	French	21	2015/2016	PSG
Jean Butez	GK	French	21	2015/2016	-
Julian Palmieri	LB	French	29	2016/2017	SC Bastia
Youssef Kone	LB	Malian	21	2015/2016	-
Renato Civelli	CB	Argentinian	32	2015/2016	Bursaspor
Stoppila Sunzu	CB	Zambian	27	2015/2016	Shanghai Shenhua
Benjamin Pavard	CB	French	20	2014/2015	-
Adama Soumaoro	CB	French	24	2011/2012	-
Marko Basa	CB	Montenegrin	33	2011/2012	Lokomotiv Moscow
Sebastien Corchia	RB	French	25	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Franck Beria	RB	French	33	2007/2008	FC Metz
Ibrahim Amadou	DM	French	23	2015/2016	AS Nancy
Younousse Sankhare	DM	Senegalese	26	2016/2017	EA Guingamp
Rio Mavuba	DM	French	32	2008/2009	Villarreal
Mounir Obbadi	CM	Moroccan	33	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Sofiane Boufal	AM	Moroccan	22	2014/2015	Angers SCO
Rony Lopes*	AM	Portuguese	20	2016/2017	AS Monaco
Eric Bautheac	LW	French	28	2015/2016	OGC Nice
Ryan Mendes	RW/ST	Cape Verdean	26	2012/2013	Havre AC
Morgan Amalfitano	RW	French	31	2015/2016	West Ham United
Junior Tallo	ST	Ivorian	23	2015/2016	AS Roma
Yassine Benzia	ST	French	21	2015/2016	Olympique Lyonnais
Nicolas De Preville*	ST	French	25	2016/2017	KV Oostende
Eder	ST	Portuguese	28	2016/2017	Swansea City
Frederic Antonetti	Manager	French	54	2015/2016	Stade Rennais
Michel Seydoux	President	French	68	2001/2002	-



LILLE OSC

Lille OSC: Squad Analysis

After deciding to abandon the Herve Renard experiment before Christmas last year, Lille appointed seasoned Ligue 1 expert Frederic Antonetti and saw an impeccable rebound to form that culminated in Lille finishing in the European places in May 2016. All those efforts were however undone in one regard when just a few days ago Lille crashed out of the Europa League qualifiers as they were nonplused by Azerbaijani outfit Qabala FK. With the French football financial watchdog the DNCG's policy of forcing Lille to sell before they can buy players limiting transfer market activity, overall the summer has been an exceedingly frustrating one to date. Frederic Antonetti's reputation as merely a French top-flight fixer and dog-fighter is one that he will want to shake-off this season as his Lille side targets a similar finish in this season's Ligue 1 table to the previous campaign.

Strengths:

In defence, Frederic Antonetti is faced with the enviable dilemma of having too many excellent centre backs at his disposal. A Stoppila Sunzu and Renato Civelli pairing would combine an ideal balance of two distinctly opposite approaches to the art of defending, with one generally operating on an excellent gut feeling and the other being blessed by natural intelligence and positional awareness. They possess combined Ligue 1 experience that is virtually unparalleled by the other 19 Ligue 1 clubs' centre-back pairings. On top of that, Antonetti must appease the younger if not even more potentially talented duo of French youth international Benjamin Pavard and Adama Soumaoro with greater playing opportunities this season. The latter shone particularly last season when he capitalized on the injury misfortune suffered by his colleagues. At right-back, Sebastien Corchia is an utterly underrated asset who rivals Serge Aurier in terms of the comprehensiveness of his game. Elsewhere, the arrival of Rony Lopes on his third loan spell at Lille provides Antonetti with a vivacious talent with the ability to adequately replace the likely departing Sofiane Boufal. Oh, and there is the small matter of EURO 2016 final match-winner Eder, whose immense frame will empower him to dominate Ligue 1 defences on a regular basis.

Weaknesses:

Despite his extensive proficiency in navigating the often choppy and unpredictable waters of Ligue 1, Frederic Antonetti has never delivered success on the continent. Lille's early Europa League exit yet again proved Antonetti's limitations when it comes to successfully preparing to face opposition that originate from outside the Hexagon. For a club that wants to regularly make their mark in Europe, Antonetti's long-term future is far from assured. The arrival of Nicolas De Preville who will likely play on the right-hand side of a 4-2-3-1 somewhat dispels fears of a permanent creativity brain-freeze that Lille had seemingly been heading for. Their greatest weakness heading into to the new campaign is arguably the negative atmosphere currently emanating around the dressing room following the club's unexpected Europa League slip-up. The psychological factors are often overlooked because they are frequently the hardest to define when analysing football, but they are also usually the most important.

Verdict:

Slight question marks continue to reign over Lille's ability to create a steady flow of goal-scoring chances this campaign, especially as they are unlikely to be able to rely on Sofiane Boufal to carry them as he did last season. Despite that, expect Lille to be in the fight for Europe.

PREDICTED POSITION: 8TH



LILLE

OSC

Lille OSC: Likely XI



Lille OSC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	5th	60
2014/2015	Ligue 1	8th	56
2013/2014	Ligue 1	3rd	71
2012/2013	Ligue 1	6th	62
2011/2012	Ligue 1	3rd	74

Lille OSC: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	S. Boufal	11
2014/15	Ligue 1	Nolan Roux	9
2013/14	Ligue 1	S. Kalou	16
2012/13	Ligue 1	S. Kalou	14
2011/12	Ligue 1	E. Hazard	20

Lille OSC: Key Man

VINCENT ENYEAMA

The Nigerian goalkeeper is far too good to be plying his trade for an upper-mid-table Ligue 1 side at this stage in his career.

However, because of the rigidity of the European goalkeeping market, Enyeama has not received his shot at the big time and remains loyal to Lille's cause.

A show-stopping goalkeeper by trade, Enyeama has the necessary reflexes to back-up his wonderfully dramatic approach to his craft.

Additionally, and despite his insistence on speaking English in the dressing room, Enyeama has emerged as one of the principal leaders in and around the club and continues to act as an excellent mentor for his very talented understudy Mike Maignan.



MONTPELLIER

Montpellier HSC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Laurent Pionnier	GK	French	34	2007/2008	-
Geoffrey Jourden	GK	French	30	2006/2007	-
Jonathan Ligali	GK	French	25	2010/2011	-
Jerome Roussillon	LB/RB	French	23	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Daniel Congre	LB/CB	French	31	2012/2013	Olimpo
Hilton	CB	Brazilian	38	2011/2012	Marseille
Nicolas Saint-Ruf	CB	French	23	2014/2015	RC Lens
William Remy	CB	French	25	2015/2016	Dijon FCO
Dylan Gissi	CB/RB	Swiss	25	2014/2015	Olimpo
Mamadou N'Diaye	RB	French	21	2015/2016	-
Mathieu Deplagne	RB	French	24	2011/2012	-
Anthony Vanden Borre	RB	Belgian	28	2016/2017	RSC Anderlecht
Joris Marveaux	DM	French	33	2008/2009	Clermont Foot
Elleys Skhiri	DM	French	21	2015/2016	-
Paul Lasne	CM	French	27	2014/2015	AC Ajaccio
Jamel Saihi	CM	Tunisian	29	2006/2007	-
Pierrick Fito	CM	French	20	2016/2017	-
Killian Sanson	CM	French	19	2016/2017	Evian TG FC
Ryad Boudebouz	AM	Algerian	26	2015/2016	SC Bastia
Morgan Sanson	AM	French	21	2013/2014	Le Mans
Souleymane Camara	RW/ST	Senegalese	33	2008/2009	OGC Nice
Kevin Berigaud	ST/AM	French	28	2014/2015	Evian TG FC
Steve Mounie	ST	Beninese	21	2014/2015	-
Casimir Ninga	ST	Belgian	23	2015/2016	Mangasport
Frederic Hantz	Manager	French	50	2015/2016	SC Bastia
Louis Nicollin	President	French	73	1977/1978	-



MONTPELLIER

Montpellier HSC: Squad Analysis

Rolland Courbis ran out of patience with the flamboyant Nicollin father and son duo at the head of Montpellier midway through last season, and promptly walked out at Christmas time before eventually joining Rennes. It was a crushing blow for the 2012 title winners to lose a man who had so outperformed expectations during the 2014/2015 campaign. After a couple of bizarre decisions that included the appointment of two joint managers with zero Ligue 1 experience, MHSC eventually made a wise move for Frederic Hantz, who made his name performing relegation-preventing wonders for the consistently cash-stripped SC Bastia. In the end, Hantz comfortably saved Montpellier from the prospect of Ligue 2 football for the 2016/2017 season. However, following the sale of midfield lynchpins Jonas Martin and Bryan Dabo this summer, Montpellier are likely to struggle once again.

Strengths:

Montpellier have a distinct advantage over their relegation-threatened rivals this season in the sense that their squad is experienced in handling the pressure-cooker situations that arise when one is scraping in the pits of Ligue 1. Enigmatic captain Hilton is 38 this season, but has shown little signs of being overcome by the physically exerting nature of the French top flight. He is likely to be joined by William Remy at the heart of defence, a man who is making a name for himself thanks to his mobility and ball-playing abilities. In midfield, it is essential for Montpellier that French youth international Morgan Sanson is heavily involved all season. His quick mind and even faster feet make him a tricky proposition for opponents, especially because of the free licence that he is set to be given to roam across the field, but also in between the opposition's defence and attack. Anthony Vanden Borre adds that bit of journeyman experience and will almost certainly make the right-back position his own.

Weaknesses:

The lack of a proven, potent goalscorer: it might be an obvious problem to identify, but a difficult one to address, especially for a side with Montpellier's cash flow. Granted, Casimir Ninga came out of nowhere to impress under Rolland Courbis, but since the arrival of Frederic Hantz, the Belgian has not been trusted nor picked consistently upfront. Hantz's love for constant tactical tweaking oftentimes saw Ninga come out to the wing or even sit on the bench instead, in a move that left the player and the fans somewhat underwhelmed. Ligue 1's perennial impact substitute specialist Souleymane Camara is an admirable worker and his typical seven or so goals a season could be enough to keep Montpellier up on their own, but it would be a big risk not to recruit. There is a gaping hole in the defensive midfield area, which must quickly be plugged. The tenacity of Jonas Martin and Bryan Dabo's buoyancy are traits that we fear are irreplaceable for Montpellier this summer, with both moving to pastures anew.

Verdict:

Without a competent defensive midfielder to shield Montpellier's current first choice back four and a proven goalscorer, the start of this campaign appears a little daunting in nature. However, with the tactical brilliance of Frederic Hantz and enough creativity in advanced midfield areas, MHSC should be fine.

PREDICTED POSITION: 16TH



MONTPELLIER

Montpellier HSC: Likely XI



Montpellier HSC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	12th	49
2014/2015	Ligue 1	7th	56
2013/2014	Ligue 1	15th	42
2012/2013	Ligue 1	9th	52
2011/2012	Ligue 1	1st	82

Montpellier HSC: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	S. Camara & C. Ninga	7
2014/15	Ligue 1	L. Barrios	11
2013/14	Ligue 1	R. Cabella	14
2012/13	Ligue 1	Y. Belhanda & S. Camara	10
2011/12	Ligue 1	O. Giroud	21

Montpellier HSC: Key Man

RYAD BOUDEBOUZ

Reunited under Frederic Hantz, Ryad Boudebouz adopted a revitalized approach in the second half of the 2015/2016 campaign.

The diminutive Algerian playmaker responded to Morgan Sanson's horrible injury luck by bearing full responsibility for chance creation in the Montpellier side for the vast majority of last season. As has become business as usual for Boudebouz in Ligue 1 in recent years, he delivered.

In fact he delivered to such an extent that he created more chances in the French top flight last season than any player plying his trade for a side that finished in the bottom half of the table, and even alone created more chances than the entire ESTAC Troyes team combined!

With whispers emanating about possible interest from Serie A, Ligue 1 enthusiasts will hope that the former Sochaux man stays put for one more campaign. An advanced midfield partnership of Sanson and Boudebouz would be salivating to watch and would also more than secure safety for MHSC.



OGC NICE

OGC Nice: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Yoan Cardinale	GK	French	22	2014/2015	-
Simon Pouplin	GK	French	31	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Mouez Hassen	GK	French	21	2012/2013	-
Walter Benitez	GK	Argentinian	23	2016/2017	Quilmes
Olivier Boscagli	LB	French	19	2015/2016	-
Dalbert	LB	Brazilian	22	2016/2017	Vitoria Guimaraes
Kevin Gomis	CB	French	27	2011/2012	Naval
Maxime Le Marchand	CB	French	26	2015/2016	Le Havre
Lucas Rougeaux	CB	French	22	2013/2014	-
Paul Baysse	CB	French	28	2016/2017	AS Saint-Etienne
Mathieu Bodmer	CB/CM	French	33	2013/2014	PSG
Gautier Lloris	CB	French	21	2014/2015	-
Ricardo Pereira*	RB	Portuguese	22	2015/2016	FC Porto
Arnaud Souquet	RB	French	24	2016/2017	Dijon FCO
Remi Walter	DM	French	21	2015/2016	AS Nancy Lorraine
Jean Michael Seri	DM	Ivorian	25	2015/2016	Pacos de Ferreira
Albert Rafetraniaina	DM	Madagascan	19	2014/2015	-
Valentin Eysseric	CM/AM	French	24	2012/2013	AS Monaco
Vincent Koziello	CM	French	19	2014/2015	-
Wylan Cyprien	CM	French	21	2016/2017	RC Lens
Arnaud Lusamba	AM	French	19	2016/2017	AS Nancy Lorraine
Said Benrahma	RW	Algerian	21	2014/2015	-
Bryan Constant	ST	French	22	2014/2015	-
Alexy Bosetti	ST	French	23	2012/2013	-
Mickael Le Bihan	ST	French	26	2015/2016	Havre AC
Anastasios Donis*	ST	Greek	19	2016/2017	Juventus
Alassane Plea	ST	French	23	2014/2015	Olympique Lyonnais
Lucien Favre	Manager	French	58	2016/2017	Gladbach
Jean Pierre Rivere	President	French	59	2011/2012	-



OGC NICE

OGC Nice: Squad Analysis

Football is arguably most beautiful when hard work pays off. Hard work does not originate from spending millions of Euros on a brand new playing squad. In modern football, it is neither difficult nor does it require much skill to spend silly if the resources are available to you. In this age, real hard-work manifests itself in a manager's bravery to implement bold ideas to fundamentally revolutionize a club's style of play and bring the surrounding town together in the process, working within modest means. This is exactly what OGC Nice achieved last season under Claude Puel. Les Aiglons were more attractive to watch than PSG at points, with an exceptional blend of possession hungry build-up play and ruthless attacking effectiveness. They qualified for automatic entry to the Europa League group stages, but many of the key instigators of success, the manager included, have since departed. Now under the leadership of highly rated tactician Lucien Favre, Les Aiglons's aim is to prove that the 2015/2016 campaign was a springboard for long-term success.

Strengths:

Aside from PSG, OGC Nice had the most talented and cohesive midfield in the league last season and Les Aiglons have been able to conserve two of the three elements from that breathtaking troika. Former captain Nampalys Mendy has departed to Premier League champions Leicester City, but the exceptionally talented, creative genius Vincent Koziello remains, as does Jean Michael Seri who proved that he can do just about anything if he puts his mind to it last season. In Yoan Cardinale, Claude Puel unearthed an unlikely hero. The young French goalkeeper does not have the build of your modern-day goalkeeper, but his shot-stopping capacity and dominance in one-on-one situations gives him the edge in what is a fantastically talented pool of goalkeepers available to Favre this campaign.

Weaknesses:

OGC Nice's defence was much improved in their momentous campaign last term, with Paul Baysse and Maxime Le Marchand exceeding expectations. However, with the added burden of Thursday night Europa League action, their lack of strength in depth at centre-back is worrying. The loss of Hatem Ben Arfa is an example of the departure of a player that Nice will simply not recover from, as is also likely the case with regards to the loan return of Valere Germain to AS Monaco. The latter two individuals were the club's top goal-scorers last time out and Alassane Plea is still too raw to be relied upon to pick up the mantle on his own. The recruitment of a striker, preferably one with experience in European competitions is more of a daydream than a reality at this stage. Despite the arrival of Chinese investment into the club this summer, Nice will not deviate from their principles of giving youth the platform to learn and flourish. This ideology, although commendable and potentially financially lucrative in the long term, tends to be at the detriment of short-term, on-pitch results.

Verdict:

Even if Lucien Favre is the best replacement that OGC Nice could have hoped for, the departure of Claude Puel and the trio of Jeremy Pied, Valere Germain and Hatem Ben Arfa is too much to handle. Lucien Favre will implement his own ideas and fresh talent will take time to adapt to a new manager and in many cases an entirely new division. They will be entertaining in Europe, but are unlikely to finish in the top five.

PREDICTED POSITION: 6TH



OGC

NICE

OGC Nice: Likely XI



OGC Nice: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	4 th	63
2014/2015	Ligue 1	11 th	48
2013/2014	Ligue 1	17 th	42
2012/2013	Ligue 1	4 th	64
2011/2012	Ligue 1	13 th	42

OGC Nice: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	Hatem Ben Arfa	17
2014/15	Ligue 1	C. Eduardo	10
2013/14	Ligue 1	D. Cvitanich	8
2012/13	Ligue 1	D. Cvitanich	19
2011/12	Ligue 1	F.Monzon & A.Mounier	8

OGC Nice: Key Man

ARNAUD LUSAMBA

Certainly a surprising pick for "Key Man," but 19-year-old attacking midfielder Arnaud Lusamba has the unenviable task of filling both the creative and goal-scoring void that Hatem Ben Arfa has left behind on the Cote D'Azur.

Crazily enough, with a little time, we believe that the French youth international can make the Nice faithful forget all about Ben Arfa. Much like the now PSG man, Lusamba loves to play in the pocket between an opposition's defence and midfield. He possesses the same frightening pace and to a certain extent, similar dribbling qualities too.

Not only that, but Lusamba is certainly a more composed finisher than Ben Arfa was at his age and crucially is far more willing to track back and defend than HBA is.

After a little grace period to make the transition to France's top division, Arnaud Lusamba can terrify Ligue 1 defences to the bone.



MARSEILLE

Olympique de Marseille: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Yohann Pele	GK	French	33	2015/2016	FC Sochaux
Brice Samba	GK	French	22	2013/2014	Havre AC
Florian Escales	GK	French	20	2016/2017	-
Henri Bedimo	LB	Cameroonian	32	2016/2017	Olympique Lyonnais
Alhousseyni Sane	LB	French	20	2016/2017-	
Tomas Hubocan	CB	Slovakian	30	2016/2017	Dynamo Moscow
Doria	CB	Brazilian	21	2014/2015	Botafogo
Baptiste Aloie	CB	French	22	2012/2013	-
Karim Rekik	CB	Dutch	21	2015/2016	Manchester City
Gael Andonian	CB	French	21	2015/2016	-
Rolando	CB	Portuguese	30	2015/2016	FC Porto
Hiroki Sakai	RB	Japanese	26	2016/2017	Hannover 96
Lassana Diarra	DM	French	31	2015/2016	Lokomotiv Moscow
Abou Diaby	DM	French	30	2015/2016	Arsenal FC
Bill Tuiloma	DM	New Zealander	21	2013/2014	Birkenhead United
Andre Zambo Anguissa	DM	Cameroonian	20	2015/2016	Stade de Reims
Zinedine Machach	CM	French	20	2016/2017	Toulouse FC
Florian Thauvin*	AM/RW	French	23	2016/2017	Newcastle United
Remy Cabella	AM	French	26	2016/2017	Newcastle United
Maxime Lopez	AM	French	18	2014/2015	-
Said Eddine Khaoui	AM	French	21	2016/2017	Tours FC
Romain Alessandrini	LW	French	27	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Georges-Kevin N'Koudou	LW	French	21	2015/2016	FC Nantes
Bouna Sarr	RW	Guinean	24	2015/2016	FC Metz
Bafetimbi Gomis	ST	French	31	2016/2017	Swansea City
Aaron Leya Iseka*	ST	Belgian	18	2016/2017	Anderlecht RSC
Antoine Rabillard	ST	French	20	2015/2016	-
Jeremie Porsan-Clemente	ST	French	18	2015/2016	-
Franck Passi	Manager	French	50	2014/2015	-
Giovanni Ciccolunghi	President	Italian	73	2016/2017	-



MARSEILLE

Olympique de Marseille: Squad Analysis

Think of everything that could possibly go wrong for a football club in a year, relegation excluded, and you have Marseille's 2015/2016 campaign. The charismatic Marcelo Bielsa stormed out after the first match of the season over financial differences concerning his new contract with the Marseille board. From that point onwards, all hell broke loose. Under the sparkling smile of Spaniard Michel, Marseille played some of the worst, most incoherent football in modern times. All hell broke loose as OM suffered a miserable campaign that saw them flirting with the relegation places right until the third last day of the season. Marseille fans, generally known for their obscene passion when it comes to their football club, wanted blood. Marseille President Vincent Labrune needed police protection, fans stopped going to home matches. He has since departed, and owner Margarita Louis Dreyfus is attempting to follow suit as she seeks to sell the club. This summer, Marseille has been a car boot sale for transfer activity, desperately selling anything worth something in a bid to pump liquid into the club to make it more presentable to potential buyers. The entire situation is a farce and it is not coming to an end anytime soon.

Strengths:

When all is said and done, history will show that several of Vincent Labrune's final pieces of transfer window thriftiness were successful. The return of Florian Thauvin on an initial loan with an obligation to buy secures Marseille a fan favourite in a time that the club's management needs as much good-will as possible from its supporters. Thauvin's qualities have been rightly questioned in recent times, but if he is to ever recapture his SC Bastia form, it is in Ligue 1 where that will occur. There are plenty of exciting young prospects that can take advantage of such a thin first team squad makeup. Teenager Maxime Lopez has in particular had an excellent pre-season. Lassana Diarra has been made captain and should he stay, after an exceptional renaissance last season, his value to the team and to fairly inexperienced manager Franck Passi will be unexplainably great.

Weaknesses:

It is especially in defence that Marseille's squad looks so frankly embarrassing for a side that half a decade ago was such a force on the European stage. Karim Rekik is the perfect example of an act first, think later central defender who had a torrid time in his maiden Ligue 1 season. In his partner Rolando, Marseille have their least mobile since Souleymane Diawara when he was at the end of his career. In goal, Marseille have decided to replace Steve Mandanda internally. We would be encouraged to see the raw but exciting Brice Samba receive the number one shirt, but we fear that Passi will give it to the consistently ordinary Yohann Pele instead. Generally speaking, the holes left by the club's fire-sale are being patched up by a bundle of youngsters. Pre-season in general was distressing, even humiliating with Marseille looking helpless against sides of a far lesser calibre. Franck Passi, although an incredibly nice guy, has much convincing to do that he has the necessary tactical education and knowledge to successfully lead what was previously one of Ligue 1's flagship outfits.

Verdict:

Predicting the way in which a Marseille season will pan out is a near impossible task, and much depends on the second half of their transfer window. We fear that Passi's weaknesses will be uncovered in a brutal manner this season, but should just sneak top 10.

PREDICTED POSITION: 9TH



MARSEILLE

Marseille: Likely XI



Marseille: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	13th	48
2014/2015	Ligue 1	4th	69
2013/2014	Ligue 1	6th	60
2012/2013	Ligue 1	2nd	71
2011/2012	Ligue 1	10th	48

Marseille: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	Michy Batshuayi	17
2014/15	Ligue 1	A-P Gignac	21
2013/14	Ligue 1	A-P Gignac	16
2012/13	Ligue 1	A-P Gignac	13
2011/12	Ligue 1	Loic Remy	12

Marseille: Key Man

BAFETIMBI GOMIS

It is fair to say that the former French international, best known in England for his panther celebration, lost his way somewhat in the Premier League last season.

However, Bafetimbi Gomis is an example that proven quality is available for Ligue 1 clubs in the European transfer market if you have the stamina and tenacity to negotiate down the cash-rich Premier League clubs for their undesirables.

With this loan to Marseille, Gomis has been given the platform to convince some of Europe's elite that he really does deserve a chance to finish his career by achieving his final ambition of playing for a side that regularly competes in the Champions League.

Often ridiculed for his penchant for being offside, nobody can deny that Gomis's finishing and shooting power will enable him to threaten all Ligue 1 defences and even give him an outside shot at the Ligue 1 golden boot.



LYON

Olympique Lyonnais: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Anthony Lopes	GK	Portuguese	25	2011/2012	-
Mathieu Gorgelin	GK	French	26	2011/2012	-
Lucas Mocio	GK	French	22	2014/2015	-
Maciej Rybus	LB	Polish	26	2016/2017	Terek Grozny
Jeremy Morel	LB	French	31	2015/2016	Marseille
Mapou Yanga Mbiwa	CB	French	27	2015/2016	AS Roma
Nicolas N'Koulou	CB	Cameroonian	26	2016/2017	Olympique Marseille
Emanuel Mammana	CB	Argentinian	20	2016/2017	River Plate
Rafael	RB	Brazilian	26	2015/2016	Manchester United
Christophe Jallet	RB	French	32	2014/2015	PSG
Gueida Fofana	DM	French	25	2011/2012	Havre AC
Maxime Gonalons	DM	French	27	2009/2010	-
Lucas Tousart	DM	French	19	2015/2016	Valenciennes FC
Corentin Tolisso	CM	French	22	2013/2014	-
Jordan Ferri	CM	French	24	2012/2013	-
Sergi Darder	CM	Spanish	22	2015/2016	Malaga CF
Clement Grenier	CM	French	25	2008/2009	-
Olivier Kemen	CM	French	20	2015/2016	Newcastle United
Maxime D'Arpino	CM	French	20	2016/2017	-
Nabil Fekir	AM	Algerian	23	2013/2014	-
Rachid Ghezzal	LW	Algerian	24	2012/2013	-
Alexandre Lacazette	ST	French	25	2009/2010	-
Maxwel Cornet	ST/LW	French	19	2014/2015	FC Metz
Aldo Kalulu	ST	French	20	2015/2016	-
Gaetan Perrin	ST	French	20	2016/2017	-
Bruno Genesio	Manager	French	49	2015/2016	-
Jean Michel Aulas	President	French	67	1987/1988	-



LYON

Olympique Lyonnais: Squad Analysis

A summer of discontent was followed by a testing first six months for Lyon last season. A public contract dispute between the club and star striker Alexandre Lacazette set the tone for a tumultuous Champions League campaign under the out-of-ideas, 4-3-3-dependent Hubert Fournier who was eventually dismissed at the turn of the calendar year. What followed was a remarkable, if not that surprising resurgence in form which saw previously unconfirmed caretaker manager Bruno Genesio take OL to 2nd spot and the holy grail of automatic Champions League qualification, subsequently earning himself a long-term contract as full-time manager in the process.

Strengths:

Lyon's high-octane football captured the hearts and minds of Ligue 1 followers and pundits alike in the second half of 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. The high pressing game that Genesio has implemented forces the collective to work harder over the course of 90 minutes, but should also allow them to surprise bigger sides in the Champions League, as well as PSG. The return of Nabil Fekir from a nasty ACL injury that he suffered at the start of last season whilst on international duty is a god-send for Lyon as it offers them a second truly world class player in attack, with that special *je ne sais quoi* necessary to unlock some of Ligue 1's tightest defences. His close control and dribbling abilities are arguably second in Europe only to the likes of a Lionel Messi, which we promise is not an overstatement. Sergi Darder can also be expected to shine this season, after a settling in period last term. The Spaniard has so far showed glimpses of real quality and looks to have the finesse but also the resilience to succeed in a box-to-box role in the French top flight.

Weaknesses:

PSG's crushing victory over Lyon in the recent Trophee des Champions encounter exposed glaring inadequacies in defensive areas. The signing of Nicolas N'Koulou has been rather lazily regarded as a good piece of business in many corners of the French football world. Many forget that the Cameroonian international was incredibly disappointing during his last 18 months at Marseille. He has failed to progress in his reading of the game and surprisingly continues to lack strength in the aerial battles. When he was younger, he was forgiven for the youthful exuberance that he showed with his rumbustious approach to defending, but as he reaches the supposed summit of his career, he must improve considerably and quickly, or else Lyon will struggle. Mapou Yanga Mbiwa's partnership with Samuel Umtiti was successful when the latter was fit, but the former Newcastle man had a tough time avoiding blunders otherwise and was ridiculed by many pundits in the front half of last season. Emanuel Mammana could be the answer to filling the void left by Samuel Umtiti's move to Barcelona, but for such a young man leaving your country of birth for Europe and France is an enormous shift that he will surely need time to acclimatize to.

Verdict:

We have a feeling that they will start surprisingly poorly, before picking up to challenge with AS Monaco again for that automatic Champions League spot, and ultimately they should win that battle.

PREDICTED POSITION: 2ND



LYON

Olympique Lyonnais: Likely XI



Lyon: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	2nd	65
2014/2015	Ligue 1	2nd	75
2013/2014	Ligue 1	5th	61
2012/2013	Ligue 1	3rd	67
2011/2012	Ligue 1	4th	64

Lyon: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	A. Lacazette	21
2014/15	Ligue 1	A. Lacazette	27
2013/14	Ligue 1	A. Lacazette	15
2012/13	Ligue 1	B. Gomis	16
2011/12	Ligue 1	L. Lopez	16

Olympique Lyonnais: Key Man

ALEXANDRE LACAZETTE

The French striker's previous campaign was a tale of two halves with a contract dispute and back problems preventing him from putting in his best work in the latter end of 2015.

He was unleashed and re-inspired by Bruno Genesio in 2016 and returned to his 2014/2015 form as Lyon's indelible, talismanic forward.

He no longer relies on just his pace to beat opponents, he has brought power into his game too.

With a natural talent for art of goal-scoring when it comes to tight spaces, should Lacazette remain at Lyon, he can affirm himself as one of the best in Europe.

This is the turning point campaign for the Frenchman where he turns the last of his "potential" tag into proven talent, on both the domestic and continental stages.



PSG

PSG: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Salvatore Sirigu	GK	Italian	29	2011/2012	Palermo
Kevin Trapp	GK	German	26	2015/2016	Eintracht Frankfurt
Alphonse Areola	GK	French	23	2013/2014	-
Maxwell	LB	Brazilian	34	2011/2012	FC Barcelona
Layvin Kurzawa	LB	French	23	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Thiago Silva	CB	Brazilian	31	2012/2013	AC Milan
David Luiz	CB	Brazilian	29	2014/2015	Chelsea FC
Marquinhos	CB	Brazilian	22	2013/2014	AS Roma
Presnel Kimpembe	CB	French	20	2014/2015	-
Thomas Meunier	RB	Belgian	24	2016/2017	Club Brugge
Serge Aurier	RB	Ivorian	23	2014/2015	Toulouse FC
Thiago Motta	DM	Italian	33	2011/2012	Inter Milan
Benjamin Stambouli	DM	French	25	2015/2016	Tottenham Hotspur
Grzegorz Krychowiak	DM	Polish	26	2016/2017	Sevilla CF
Blaise Matuidi	CM	French	29	2011/2012	St Etienne
Christopher Nkunku	CM	French	18	2015/2016	-
Marco Verratti	CM	Italian	23	2012/2013	Pescara
Adrien Rabiot	CM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Jese	LW	Spanish	23	2016/2017	Real Madrid CF
Javier Pastore	AM/LW	Argentinian	27	2011/2012	Palermo
Angel di Maria	AM	Argentinian	28	2015/2016	Manchester United
Hatem Ben Arfa	AM	French	29	2016/2017	OGC Nice
Lucas	RW	Brazilian	23	2012/2013	Sao Paulo
Jean Christophe-Bahebeck	RW	French	23	2011/2012	-
Edinson Cavani	ST	Uruguayan	29	2013/2014	Napoli
Hervin Ongenda	ST/RW	French	21	2013/2014	-
Jean Kevin Augustin	ST	French	19	2014/2015	-
Unai Emery	Manager	Spanish	44	2016/2017	Sevilla CF
Nasser Al Khelaifi	President	Qatari	42	2010/2011	-



PSG

PSG: Squad Analysis

From a domestic perspective, the 2015/2016 campaign was the season to end all seasons for the capital club. PSG smashed the record points total for a Ligue 1 club in the modern era, finishing with an enormous 96 points and winning the quadruple. Thanks to an astonishing Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who averaged one goal every league game, but also due to the shortcomings of PSG's supposed rivals, the gap in class in the French top flight has never appeared larger than it did last season. With all these fantastic achievements you would be forgiven for thinking that Les Parisiens had a good campaign by their own standards. Not the case, in fact PSG were deemed to have performed so poorly in the Champions League Quarter Finals against Manchester City by the club's board that Laurent Blanc lost his job. Up stepped Unai Emery, a manager who has been brought in to radically change the direction of the PSG project. If Nasser Al Khelaifi was hoping to mimic Real Madrid initially with his PSG project, he has realized that the current status of Ligue 1 prevents such a model from working because the likes of Neymar, despite PSG's best efforts, cannot quite be convinced to join the club. So the focus has shifted: from the individual (à la Ibrahimovic) to a focus on preparing better than every other elite side in Europe and new-age training regimes under Unai Emery. Al Khelaifi wants PSG to imitate the other Madrid team, Atletico, for the first time since the QSI reign began, and that is the best way to explain the significant changes around the club this summer.

Strengths:

Yes, the king has decided to cross the Channel, but PSG still have an utterly mouth-watering squad on paper. Javier Pastore, a previously maligned figure under the Blanc regime following the arrival of Angel di Maria, has been given both the confidence and licence to roam to make the number 10 role his own, which should allow him to educe his incredible 2014/15 form. Emery has decided to opt for a 4-2-3-1 in order to get the best out of the Argentinian. The signings of Jese and Hatem Ben Arfa add cover in attacking areas for PSG. Both individuals are exceptional and versatile in their own right. In midfield, Marco Verratti has the character to put an injury-swept season behind him and once again stun Europe with a combination of his remarkable vision, dogged defensive work and perfect passing capabilities. Grzegorz Krychowiak proved at EURO 2016 that he is one of Europe's best midfielders and his prior knowledge of Unai Emery's methods will expedite the implementation process of the Spaniard's new system.

Weaknesses:

Edinson Cavani is not of the required standard if PSG expect to be able to win the Champions League in the near future. The next six months will be pivotal for the Uruguayan in terms of his PSG career, as he can no longer blame Zlatan Ibrahimovic for his poor performances. We fear for Les Parisiens who now exclusively have to rely on Cavani to lead the line on the continental stage.

Verdict:

Predicting PSG's final league position is nothing more than a formality, what interests us is how Unai Emery will fair in the business end of the Champions League, whether or not he can better his predecessors efforts. There is little doubt that this PSG side will be the best match prepared week-in, week-out since the QSI era began, but Emery is not well-known for his game management abilities and that might count against him.

PREDICTED POSITION: 1ST



PSG

PSG: Likely XI



PSG: Key Man

ANGEL DI MARIA

Angel di Maria underwent an enormous transformation in a short period of time when he dominated for PSG in every competition last season, just months after struggling to make any impact in the Premier League with Manchester United.

The key to the Argentinian's success was that Laurent Blanc gave him permission to roam freely across virtually all attacking areas, as well as affording the player the capacity to come deep for the ball when necessary.

PSG: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	1st	96
2014/2015	Ligue 1	1st	83
2013/2014	Ligue 1	1st	89
2012/2013	Ligue 1	1st	83
2011/2012	Ligue 1	2nd	79

PSG: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	38
2014/15	Ligue 1	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	19
2013/14	Ligue 1	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	26
2012/13	Ligue 1	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	30
2011/12	Ligue 1	Nene	21

This season, Di Maria will return to the left wing, where he was most often used at Real Madrid, and will have to not only accept to work in a more disciplined position in terms of offensive actions, but also accede to tracking back to help out the PSG left-back.

It will be interesting to see how Di Maria contends with the apparent stripping back of the allowances made for him in his first season with Les Parisiens. If he fails to conform, Emery will not hesitate to remove him.



SC BASTIA

SC Bastia: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Jean Louis Leca	GK	French	30	2013/2014	Valenciennes FC
Paul Charruau	GK	French	23	2016/2017	Valenciennes FC
Thomas Vincensini	GK	French	22	2013/2014	-
Florian Marange	LB	French	30	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Mathieu Peybernes	CB	French	25	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Abdelhamid El Kaoutari*	CB	Moroccan	26	2016/2017	Palermo
Sebastien Squillaci	CB	French	35	2013/2014	Arsenal FC
Alexander Djiku	CB/RB	French	21	2015/2016	-
Gilles Cioni	RB	French	32	2010/2011	-
Yannick Cahuzac	DM	French	31	2005/2006	-
Mehdi Mostefa	DM	Algerian	32	2015/2016	Trabzonspor
Lyes Hourri	DM	French	20	2014/2015	Valenciennes FC
Abdoulaye Keita	DM	Malian	22	2014/2015	-
Lassana Coulibaly	CM	Malian	20	2015/2016	-
Geoffrey Acheampong	AM	Ghanaian	19	2016/2017	-
Saido Diallo	AM	Guinean	24	2015/2016	Rennes
Axel Ngando	AM	Cameroonian	23	2015/2016	Stade Rennais
Lenny Nangis*	LW/AM	French	22	2016/2017	LOSC Lille
Gael Danic	LW	French	34	2014/2015	Olympique Lyonnais
Jerson Cabral	LW	Dutch	25	2016/2017	FC Twente
Allan Saint Maximin*	RW	French	19	2016/2017	AS Monaco
Florian Raspentino	RW	French	27	2015/2016	SM Caen
Enzo Crivelli*	ST	French	21	2016/2017	Girondins de Bordeaux
Thievy Bifouma	ST	French	24	2016/2017	Espanyol
Francois Ciccolini	Manager	French	54	2016/2017	JS Kabylie
Pierre-Marie Geronimi	President	French	-	2009/2010	-



SC BASTIA

SC Bastia: Squad Analysis

The French top flight would be a much duller place without the feisty Corsican side among its ranks. SC Bastia's impenetrable fortress at home was a major factor in the way in which they so comfortably avoided relegation last season. The previous campaign was however not without its bumps in the road, with previously-adored manager Ghislain Printant being handed his notice as a consequence of a prolonged patch of bad form. Always canny with their hirings and firings, be it in either the coaching or the playing staff, the Corsican club recruited from within, appointing Francois Ciccolini in Printant's place. The move was initially greeted by anguish, as Ciccolini had once been responsible for the club's relegation from the top flight ten years ago during his first spell at the helm. The SC Bastia board ignored the ominous omens that the club's history books threw up and Ciccolini reunited a previously broken dressing room to secure top flight status for a fifth consecutive term.

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 Corsicans have replaced the now retired long-time leader and central defender Francois Modesto in surprisingly easy fashion after moving to nab Abdelhamid El Kaoutari on loan from Italy. As is normal with one of Ligue 1's financially less powerful sides, there is plenty of young blood to go around the squad this season. SC Bastia have some real gems to unearth in Alexander Djiku and Lassana Coulibaly. Both have the potential to become big names in French football. The signing of U20 World Cup winner Paul Charruau might prove to be Bastia's most intelligent summer business of all, with goalkeeper Jean Louis Leca previously being identified as a glaring weak point.

Weaknesses:

As is often the case for the Corsican outfit, the departures have not been unsubstantial. The loss of loud and proud left-sided player Julian Palmieri is a particularly large blow to the dressing room, simply because of the scale of his influence in every corner of the club. Florian Marange will not provide the same attacking threat down the left-hand side and SC Bastia would be well advised to recruit in that position. Enzo Crivelli was generally unimpressive at Bordeaux but has been given a loan opportunity by Ciccolini. It will be interesting to see if the added motivation that comes with knowing that you are being relied upon as a major source of goals can ignite a fire under Crivelli to give the French youth international the necessary motivation to have a breakthrough season. Tactically under Ciccolini SC Bastia have fared very well, but the side was less inclined to be as bold as they are with their play at home on away days. If they were more consistent with their direct approach across all matches, they might be able to reach even higher than 10th.

Verdict:

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

PREDICTED POSITION: 12TH



SC BASTIA

SC Bastia: Likely XI



SC Bastia: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	10th	50
2014/2015	Ligue 1	12th	47
2013/2014	Ligue 1	10th	49
2012/2013	Ligue 1	12th	47
2011/2012	Ligue 2	1st	71

SC Bastia: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	Floyd Ayite	8
2014/15	Ligue 1	Floyd Ayite	6
2013/14	Ligue 1	Gianni Bruno	8
2012/13	Ligue 1	Anthony Modeste	15
2011/12	Ligue 2	Toifilou Maoulida	13

SC Bastia: Key Man

Thievy Bifouma

Floyd Ayite's departure this summer was pre-arranged long before the window officially opened, but SC Bastia were unable to sign a replacement until receiving a portion of the transfer fee for the Togo international. Ayite was the club's top Ligue 1 goalscorer in both of the last two seasons and the void that he has left at such a passionately supported club is gigantic. The Corsicans have opted for Thievy Bifouma on a free transfer as his replacement, in what could prove another shrewd move. Bifouma has shown on loan spells at West Brom and Reims that he has the ability to get ten or so goals a season, the type of number that SC Bastia will require in order to assure safety.

However, the very nature of his career so far, five loan spells in the space of four years, is also alarming. The reason behind his inability to remain at a single club for very long is reportedly his lack of attention to detail in training and that managers find it difficult to keep him motivated and focused. Perhaps Bifouma's heart will be captured by the Furiani atmosphere and this frustrating talent can finally make a name for himself for all the right reasons.



CAEN

SM Caen: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Remy Vercoutre	GK	French	36	2014/2015	Olympique Lyonnais
Matthieu Dreyer	GK	French	27	2016/2017	ESTAC Troyes
Paul Reulet	GK	French	22	2012/2013	-
Emmanuel Imorou	LB	French	27	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Chaker Alhadhur	LB/RB	Comorian	24	2015/2016	FC Nantes
Syam Ben Youssef	CB	Tunisian	27	2015/2016	Astra Giurgiu
Romain Genevois	CB	French	28	2016/2017	OGC Nice
Damien da Silva	CB	French	28	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Alaeddine Yahia	CB	Tunisian	34	2014/2015	RC Lens
Mouhamadou Dabo	RB	French	29	2016/2017	ESTAC Troyes
Nicolas Seube	DM	French	37	2001/2002	Toulouse FC
Jordan Adeoti	DM	Beninese	27	2014/2015	Stade Lavallois
Vlaentin Voisin	DM	French	20	2016/2017	-
Ismael Diomande	DM	Ivorian	23	2016/2017	AS Saint Etienne
Jean-Victor Makengo	CM	French	18	2015/2016	-
Jonathan Delaplace	CM	French	30	2015/2016	LOSC Lille
Jordan Leborgne	CM	French	20	2015/2016	-
Steed Malbranque	CM	French	36	2016/2017	Olympique Lyonnais
Julien Feret	AM	French	34	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Jordan N'Kololo	AM	Congolese	23	2015/2016	Clermont Foot
Jeff Louis	AM	Haitian	23	2015/2016	Standard Liege
Vincent Bessat	LW	French	30	2015/2016	FC Nantes
Christian Kouakou	LW	Ivorian	25	2015/2016	Tours FC
Herve Bazile	LW/RW	Haitian	26	2014/2015	Poire-sur-Vie
Ronny Rodelin	RW/ST	French	26	2016/2017	LOSC Lille
Andy Delort	ST	French	23	2015/2016	Wigan Athletic
Pape Sane	ST	Senegalese	24	2015/2016	Bourg-Peronnas
Patrice Garande	Manager	French	55	2012/2013	AS Cherbourg
Jean-Francois Fortin	President	French	69	2002/2003	-



CAEN

SM Caen: Squad Analysis

Patrice Garande and his merry Normandy-based outfit consolidated their surprising success from the 2014/2015 season last term by finishing an incredible 7th. This was in part thanks to the limitations of certain French football giants of old (Bordeaux, Marseille), but mainly due to the club's own heroes. The attacking duo of Andy Delort and Ronny Rodelin managed to strike up an excellent understanding early doors, combining with Julian Feret to create an industrious attacking trio. 2016/2017 will be ineludibly more challenging for Caen, as they have so far failed to strengthen their squad to the same extent as direct rivals. Additionally, the perceived suitability of some of their signings, specifically their lack of, has caused eyebrows to be raised.

Strengths:

The amount of attacking talent at Patrice Garande's disposal for the forthcoming campaign could ease Caen's fears over a potentially dogged relegation knife fight. Vincent Bessat and Jeff Louis are individuals who failed to shine in their first season with SMC, but have the tenacity and ability to continually provide target man Andy Delort with the quality of service required for him to continue to build on making 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. Ismael Diomande adds a unique mélange of panache and steel to the defensive midfield.

Weaknesses:

Ismael Diomande aside, it is the spine of the midfield where Caen are most predisposed to incurring difficulties this season. Nicolas Seube proved last season already that he barely has the stamina to last 90 minutes, let alone the fact that his reduced animation in the middle of the park left his defence exposed on multiple occasions. In midfield, the signing of Steed Malbranque, especially on account of his age, seems a little needless, with Julian Feret Caen already have an older statesmen occupying the role directly behind the attacker in expert fashion. At the back, Romain Genevois and Mohamadou Dabo have been unconvincing at other Ligue 1 clubs for extended periods of time, so what does Garande know that we all don't? Star striker Andy Delort has refused to attend training for almost the entirety of pre-season, because he wants to move to Mexico, a veritable disaster for Caen.

Verdict:

Although we are not sure that Caen are on an upward trajectory, especially with the rather awkward bundle of signings they have made this summer so far, they are certainly not regressing. Having said that, it may be a case of other sides progressing and therefore dragging the Normandy outfit into a less comfortable and potentially perilous lower-table finish.

PREDICTED POSITION: 18TH



CAEN

SM Caen: Likely XI



SM Caen: Key Man

RONNY RODELIN

One of the biggest surprises of last season in the entire division, Ronny Rodelin made his initial loan move permanent this summer and will play an integral role in valiantly attempting to replicate another top ten finish.

Thriving in a right-wing position throughout the campaign, Rodelin's pinpoint finishing abilities actually flourished to a greater extent through this slight positional change than they likely would have had he played second fiddle to Andy Delort for the central role and spent most of the season on the bench.

With the powerful frontman likely to leave Caen this summer, it is all the more imperative that Ronny Rodelin proves that last season was not just some fortunate coincidence, and that he can become one of the French top flight's most threatening attackers.

SM Caen: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	7th	54
2014/2015	Ligue 1	13th	46
2013/2014	Ligue 2	3rd	64
2012/2013	Ligue 2	4th	63
2011/2012	Ligue 1	18th	38

SM Caen: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	Andy Delort	12
2014/15	Ligue 1	Herve Bazile	7
2013/14	Ligue 2	Mathieu Duhamel	24
2012/13	Ligue 2	Mathieu Duhamel	13
2011/12	Ligue 1	Benjamin Nivet	7



RENNES

Stade Rennais: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Benoit Costil	GK	French	29	2011/2012	Sedan
Afonso Figueiredo	LB	Portuguese	23	2016/2017	Boavista
Ludovic Baal	LB	French	30	2015/2016	RC Lens
Ermir Lenjani	LB	Albanian	26	2014/2015	St Gallen
Mexer	CB	Mozambican	27	2014/2015	CD Nacional
Ramy Bensabaini	CB	Algerian	21	2016/2017	Paradou AC
Pedro Mendes	CB	Portuguese	25	2015/2016	Parma
Sylvain Armand	CB	French	36	2013/2014	PSG
Romain Danze	RB/DM	French	30	2006/2007	-
Dimitri Cavare	RB	French	21	2014/2015	RC Lens
Steven Moreira	RB	French	21	2013/2014	-
Mehdi Zeffane	RB	Algerian	24	2015/2016	Olympique Lyonnais
Yacouba Sylla	DM	Malian	25	2015/2016	Aston Villa
Clement Chantome	DM	French	28	2016/2017	Girondins de Bordeaux
Sanjin Prcic	CM	Bosnian	22	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Gelson Fernandes	CM	Swiss	29	2014/2015	SC Fribourg
Christian Bruls	AM	Belgian	27	2014/2015	KAA Gent
Adrien Hunou	AM	French	22	2013/2014	-
Yoann Gourcuff	AM	French	30	2015/2016	Olympique Lyonnais
Pedro Henrique	LW	Brazilian	25	2014/2015	FC Zurich
Paul-Georges Ntep	LW	French	24	2013/2014	AJ Auxerre
Anthony Ribelin	LW	French	20	2016/2017	Montpellier HSC
Benjamin Andre	RW	French	26	2014/2015	AC Ajaccio
Kamil Grosicki	RW	Polish	28	2013/2014	Sivasspor
Wesley Said	ST/RW	French	21	2013/2014	-
Habib Habibou	ST	French	29	2014/2015	KAA Gent
Giovanni Sio	ST	Ivorian	27	2015/2016	FC Basel
Kermit Erasmus	ST	South African	26	2015/2016	Orlando Pirates
Christian Gourcuff	Manager	French	61	2016/2017	Algeria
Rene Ruello	President	French	67	2014/2015	-



RENNES

Stade Rennais: Squad Analysis

The most tactically incomprehensible manager who implemented a large variety of his ideas without success in Ligue 1 was finally sacked last season. Philippe Montanier bought and sold so many players and altered formations and systems so frequently that even he must have exited wondering what project he had left behind. Rolland Courbis took the hot seat until the end of the season, but was always going to be replaced by Christian Gourcuff come the summer. President Rene Ruello exploited his prior relationship with the former Algerian national team boss to beat a host of other top-flight sides to securing Christian Gourcuff's services. Rennes fans will be delighted to finally have a man in the dugout that has a clear brand of football and is willing and brave enough to implement it.

Strengths:

Christian Gourcuff will look to bring a brand of swift and eye-catching counter-attacking football to Rennes that allowed Lorient to flourish so consistently in Ligue 1 until his departure. Gourcuff's other key asset is his ability to identify, motivate and develop young talent. Despite the exit of Ousmane Dembele to Dortmund over the summer break, there remain plenty of gifted starlets for Gourcuff to get his hands on, from Ramy Bensabiani at the back to Sanjin Prcic in midfield. Gourcuff can use the squad's strength in depth, a characteristic that defined the Montanier era and was also arguably a liability in the sense that it was never clear what his hierarchy was, as a strength as he attempts to compete fully on all three domestic fronts.

Weaknesses:

Despite a bevy of attacking options, the recognized talent in that department seem either hampered by long-term injury problems (Paul Georges Ntep, who has 1 year on his contract left) or are demanding to depart from the club (Kamil Grosicki, who wants to leave France for reasons relating to terrorism). Another potential weakness is the dressing room politics that will come with Christian Gourcuff having to manage his son in attacking midfielder Yoann: an idiosyncratic dilemma that might cause rifts between father and son. The other side of the coin when it comes to a crowded squad is that it is difficult to promote and retain a positive atmosphere throughout a campaign when there are a handful of players who constantly feel unfairly left out of proceedings. Christian Gourcuff's strengths do not historically lie with man-management and it will be interesting to see if the playing squad is trimmed before the window shuts.

Verdict:

For 24 months now, this Rennes side has been crying out for a manager to grab it by the scruff of its neck and implement a coherent strategy for success. Not only that, but one that is accurately communicated to the players. Christian Gourcuff can achieve that and Rennes's squad on paper is impressive. However, their pursuit of European football could be blighted if a goalscorer does not emerge from within the existing playing squad, with the striker market so limited at this stage of the window.

PREDICTED POSITION: 11TH



RENNES

Stade Rennais: Likely XI



Stade Rennais: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	8th	52
2014/2015	Ligue 1	9th	50
2013/2014	Ligue 1	12th	46
2012/2013	Ligue 1	13th	46
2011/2012	Ligue 1	6th	60

Stade Rennais: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	Ousmane Dembele	12
2014/15	Ligue 1	P-G Ntep	9
2013/14	Ligue 1	Nelson Oliveira	8
2012/13	Ligue 1	Julien Feret	11
2011/12	Ligue 1	Jires Kembo Ekoko	10

Stade Rennais: Key Man

BENOIT COSTIL

Rennes rarely blew Ligue 1 opposition out of the water last season, especially in the first half of the season before Ousmane Dembele broke through, 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 when you consider his status as a French international?



TOULOUSE

Toulouse FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Marc Vidal	GK	French	25	2009/2010	-
Alban Lafont	GK	French	17	2015/2016	-
Mauro Goicoechea	GK	Uruguayan	28	2015/2016	FC Arouca
Issiaga Sylla	LB	Malian	22	2012/2013	Horoya AC
Francois Moubandje	LB	Swiss	26	2013/2014	Servette
Uros Spajic	CB	Serbian	23	2013/2014	Red Star Belgrade
Steeve Yago	CB	Burkinabe	23	2012/2013	-
Dusan Veskovac	CB	Serbian	30	2013/2014	Young Boys
Issa Diop	CB	French	19	2015/2016	-
Christopher Jullien	CB	French	23	2016/2017	Freiburg
Somalia	RB	Brazilian	27	2015/2016	Ferencváros
Pavle Ninkov	RB	Serbian	31	2011/2012	Red Star Belgrade
Pantxi Sirieix	DM	French	35	2004/2005	Auxerre
Alexis Blin	DM	French	19	2015/2016	-
Yann Bodiger	DM	French	21	2015/2016	-
Tongo Doumbia	DM	Malian	27	2014/2015	Wolves
Jessy Pi	DM	French	22	2016/2017	AS Monaco
Jean Daniel Akpa Akpro	CM	Ivorian	23	2011/2012	-
Ibrahim Sangare	CM	Ivorian	18	2016/2017	AS Dengué
Ola John*	LW	Dutch	24	2016/2017	SL Benfica
Oscar Trejo	RW/AM	Spanish	28	2013/2014	Sporting Gijón
Martin Braithwaite	ST	Danish	25	2013/2014	Esbjerg fB
Ola Toivonen	ST	Swedish	30	2016/2017	Stade Rennais
Odsonne Edouard*	ST	French	18	2016/2017	PSG
Aleksandar Pesic	ST	Serbian	24	2014/2015	FK Jagodina
Pascal Dupraz	Manager	French	53	2015/2016	Evian TG FC
Oliver Sedran	President	French	47	2001/2002	-



TOULOUSE

Toulouse FC: Squad Analysis

If you like football, you will love Toulouse. After the dismissal of Dominique Arribage in late February 2016 and with Toulouse deep in the confines of the relegation zone, Ligue 1's answer to Tony Pulis, relegation-avoiding specialist Pascal Dupraz was brave enough to take up the ostensibly impossible mission of saving Olivier Sadran's club. What happened next were a series of film-worthy events including: Pascal Dupraz turning up to take training for the first time only to collapse mid-session with a serious heart problem, his insistence on wearing the same red and white jumper every matchday to bring him luck (the last item of clothing he bought with his father before the latter passed), and culminated in Toulouse ultimately achieving the impossible by making up a ten point gap from safety with nine matches left to escape the Ligue 1 red zone on the final day of the season with a Yann Bodiger free-kick scored in the dying minutes of their fixture against Angers.

Strengths:

Spirit: there is simply no way that the emotion and enormity of their accomplishments at the tail end of last season do not give this Toulouse side a newfound confidence to push on. The retention of Pascal Dupraz keeps the charismatic and frank Savoie-born hot-head in the French top flight and provides Toulouse with one of the greatest man-managers around. The towering Issa Diop, quietly ingenious Alban Lafont and tough-tackling Alexis Blin are remarkably still all teenagers but have important roles to play if TFC are to avoid the drop once again. Jessy Pi's arrival from AS Monaco is an incredible piece of a business, with the 22 year old having been the only ESTAC Troyes player worth paying attention to last season. He will add steel and importantly a midfield structure to a side that must learn to better retain possession.

Weaknesses:

It would be foolish to expect Toulouse to be in Ligue 1 at this very moment were it not for the revitalized form that attacking sensation Wissam Ben Yedder displayed in the second half of last season. Players are often ascribed too much importance when a throwaway comment is made that so and so "carried team x or team y," but in the case of the French youth international, his goals and moments of brilliance genuinely won points on their own over the course of the last four seasons. Toulouse remain in the hunt for a striker to partner Martin Braithwaite in attack, with Pascal Dupraz rightly convinced that the loan signing of Odsonne Edouard from PSG alone is insufficient.

Verdict:

Many in the French media are overplaying the extent of Toulouse's troubles before the season has even begun. In Issa Diop and Christopher Jullien, Toulouse could have one of their best central defensive partnerships in the 21st century. If they can continue to quietly add a striker or two before the window shuts, then they will be more than comfortable.

PREDICTED POSITION: 15TH



TOULOUSE

Toulouse FC: Likely XI



Toulouse FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2015/2016	Ligue 1	17th	40
2014/2015	Ligue 1	17th	42
2013/2014	Ligue 1	9th	49
2012/2013	Ligue 1	10th	51
2011/2012	Ligue 1	8th	56

Toulouse FC: Top Goal Scorers

Season	Division	Player	Goals
2015/16	Ligue 1	W.B.Yedder	17
2014/15	Ligue 1	W.B.Yedder	14
2013/14	Ligue 1	W.B.Yedder	16
2012/13	Ligue 1	W.B.Yedder	15
2011/12	Ligue 1	U.Bulut & E.Riviere	5

Toulouse FC: Key Man

ALBAN LAFONT

The 16 year old became the youngest goalkeeper to start a game in Ligue 1 for over 25 years when he made his professional debut in late November 2015.

Toulouse, having previously been fed up of incompetency from the likes of Ali Ahamada and Mauro Goicoechea in between the sticks, made a radical decision towards the end of the calendar year to deploy the untested teenager in Ligue 1 and he was an instant hit, keeping two clean sheets in his first two games.

Lafont has displayed great athleticism and shot-stopping ability in his short professional career so far, but has also been caught out several times with misjudgments of which direction an opponent was shooting in, costing Toulouse goals on at least one occasion.

It seems almost crazy to expect more from a 17 year old in this coming campaign, but that is the incredibly high standard that Lafont has set for himself.