

Your Guide to the  
2017/18 Ligue 1 Season  
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## A Note from Chief Features Writer, Eric Devin:

So often the figure of fun in the recent past, as a product of Paris Saint-Germain's financial hegemony, Ligue 1 seemed to have gained a measure of respect last season. Monaco's performance in the Champions' League in combination with their league title put lie to the impression that football in France was a monopoly, while Nice quietly had their best season in forty years under Lucien Favre. Even Lyon, once themselves the league's perceived flat track bully, impressed, beating Roma and Besiktas on their way to the Europa League semifinal.

Further down the table, Bastia gave the league an unnecessary black eye, but there were also pleasant surprises as well. Antoine Kombouaré and Pascal Dupraz had Guingamp and Toulouse scrapping at the fringes of the top six for most of the early season, while Nantes' Sergio Conceição had *Les Canaris* flying high after his appointment. The league's reputation for producing young talent continued unabated as well, with Kylian Mbappé, Ismaila Sarr and Malang Sarr all impressing before their twentieth birthdays. All told, 2016-17 was a strong season in France, even with Paris Saint-Germain's embarrassing Champions' League exit.

This summer has seen the inevitable exodus of players, with Lyon and Monaco both losing several key components, but a surprising number of talents have chosen to stay in France, including Ismaila Sarr, (Metz to Rennes), Enzo Crivelli (Bordeaux to Angers) and Nicolas Pepe (Angers to Lille). There is also excitement over new projects at Marseille and Lille, while Rennes have also been far from spendthrift in the current window. Add in a clutch of managerial changes (Marcelo Bielsa at Lille, Claudio Ranieri at Nantes) and Ligue 1 has taken on more than a hint of the unknown, even as that uncertainty is coupled with anticipation.

The impact of Paris Saint-Germain's purchase of Neymar remains one of the biggest questions yet to be resolved, but how Lyon restructure their squad and if Monaco can recover from the loss of Bernardo Silva will also go a long way in determining the season's pecking order. How much patience will new owners at Marseille and Lille have with their investment if their sides start the season slowly? And what about Rennes, with the team's owners taking a turn towards the smorgasbord of young talent on show in France?

In the pages to come, I hope to address all of these and more, providing a comprehensive, in-depth preview to the 2017-2018 Ligue 1 season. Each side's player moves, strengths and weaknesses have been addressed, and a predicted finish has also been given. This is, by any measure, a subjective guide, but one that also aims to provide both the novice and the expert with the necessary knowledge to approach French football from a considered point of view.



# AMIENS SC

## Amiens SC: Likely XI



## Amiens SC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 2	2nd	66
2015/2016	National	3rd	55
2014/2015	National	11th	41
2013/2014	National	6th	49
2012/2013	National	9th	54

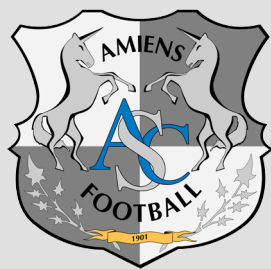
## Amiens SC: Key Man

**H**ARRISON **M**ANZALA

Manzala, late of Le Havre, proved a revelation upon replacing Jonathan Tinhan after the latter's departure to Troyes last January. Pacey, sublime on the ball and able to cross with either foot, Manzala contributed five goals and three assists in the run-in. Able to score or create from a variety of positions, he won't play a free role but rather on the flanks, hoping to interchange with newly acquired Issa Cissokho.

This season, his versatility should also combine well with that of Standard Liege loanee Jean-Luc Dompé, another tricky winger.

With the two able to play both flanks effectively, the team will have little need of a recognized number ten, relying instead on the pace of the wide players and striker Brighton Labeau to drag teams out of position. Without a proven goalscorer, then, Manzala's inventiveness and audacity will be the most important parts of Amiens' attack, at least until Kakuta is match-fit, and even then, one wouldn't be wise to bet against the youngster continuing to be manager Christophe Pelissier's go-to player.



# AMIENS SC

## Amiens SC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Régis Gurtner	GK	French	30	2015/2016	Le Havre
Jean-Christophe Bouet	GK	French	34	2017/2018	Dunkerque
Raphael Adiceam	GK	French	27	2015/2016	Aubervilliers
Bakaye Dibassy	LB	Malian	27	2016/2017	Sedan
Julien Ielsch	LB	French	34	2015/2016	Red Star
Oualid El Hajjam	RB	French	26	2014/2015	-
Issa Cissokho	RB/LB	Senegalese	32	2017/2018	Angers SCO
Prince Gouano	CB	French	23	2017/2018	Atalanta
Mathieu Bodmer	CB/DM	French	34	2017/2018	EA Guingamp
Khaled Adénon	CB	Beninese	32	2015/2016	Vendée Luçon
Nathan Dekoke	CB	French	21	2016/2017	Saint-Étienne
Guy N'Gosso	DM/CB	Cameroonian	32	2016/2017	Angers SCO
Sekou Baradji	DM	French	33	2017/2018	Valenciennes
Thomas Monconduit	CM/DM	French	26	2014/2015	AJ Auxerre
Tanguy N'Dombelé	CM	French	20	2016/2017	-
Guessouma Fofana	CM	French	24	2015/2016	Lyon-Duchere
Mahdi Talal	CM	French	19	2017/2018	Angers B
Harrison Manzala	RW/LW	DR Congolese	23	2016/2017	Le Havre
Emmanuel Bourgaud	RW	French	29	2015/2016	Colmar
Georges Gope-Fenej	LW	French	28	2015/2016	ESTAC Troyes
Gael Kakuta*	LW	DR Congolese	26	2017/2018	Heibei Fortune
Jean-Luc Dompé*	LW/RW	French	21	2017/2018	Standard Liege
Charly Charrier	AM	French	31	2016/2017	Vendée Luçon
Réda Rabei	AM	Algerian	23	2016/2017	Wasquehal
Quentin Cornette	ST	French	23	2016/2017	Montpellier HSC
Bachibou Koita	ST	Nigerien	23	2017/2018	-
Brighton Labeau	ST	French	21	2017/2018	AS Monaco B
Christophe Pélissier	Manager	French	51	2014/2015	Luzenac
Bernard Joannin	President	French	64	2011/2012	-





# AMIENS SC

## Amiens SC: Squad Analysis

Amiens' most recent transfer move, the €6m sale of Aboubakar Kamara to Fulham, has rocked the team's plans. Kamara scored eleven goals last season in Ligue 2, but more importantly, acted as a vital fulcrum for the team's attack. The pace and trickery of the likes of Harrison Manzala and Charly Charrier were only successful as a result of the powerfully built striker's combination of pace and power. The only proper centre forward the team have brought in is Monaco reserve Brighton Labeau. Labeau had a decent goal-scoring for the reserves, and certainly has the potential to impress, but this side is bereft of attacking talent. With that in mind, Christophe Pelissier has opted for veteran defenders Issa Cissokho and Mathieu Bodmer. Both are in their mid-thirties, but still of a mid-table Ligue 1 standard, and their arrivals, coupled with the return of veteran defensive midfielder Guy N'Gosso, who missed much of last year through injury, should go a long way towards solidifying Amiens' back line, which was the second-best in Ligue 2 last year but again, lacks much experience.

### Strengths:

One would normally blanch slightly at a defence containing Cissokho and Bodmer being labeled a strength, but the two, along with right-back Oualid El Hajjam and veteran centre back Khaled Adénon, offer an experienced core that should do well to protect Régis Gurtner, who has yet to feature in Ligue 1, his development with Strasbourg having coincided with the club's downfall. Amiens also appear robust in midfield, where Pelissier should play a 4-3-3 with N'Gosso behind captain Thomas Monconduit and one of Guessouma Fofana or Tanguy N'Dombélé. Manzala, Jean-Luc Dompé and Gaël Kakuta could also make the wide players in attack impressive, but the jury remains out on their ability to make the step up to Ligue 1. The team's most important asset, however, may be Pelissier himself, who delivered several years of stunning performances with Luzenac, only to be denied promotion due to financial circumstances. With that unseemly affair now behind him, the veteran manager will be eager to prove himself in Ligue 1 whilst still maintaining an attacking ethos.

### Weaknesses:

Amiens were hardly expecting promotion last season, despite the talent that Pelissier had shown during his time at Luzenac, but the team as currently constructed looks even weaker than that of a year ago, especially in attack. The departures of Kamara and Tinhan look to be simply too much to overcome, and with only Labeau and former Montpellier forward Quentin Cornette as recognised forwards at present. Questions also should be asked of Gurtner, who has never really impressed in Ligue 2 until last year, when he was adequate but not outstanding. Good at reflex saves, but sometimes guilty of poor positioning, Gurtner may remind some of a young Hugo Lloris, but given he is the same age Lloris currently (30), that is not exactly a compliment.

### Verdict:

The losses of Jonathan Tinhan and Aboubakar Kamara leave Amiens very thin in attack, and headed for relegation. However, the team were equally lightly regarded in Ligue 2 last year, with many even tipping them for relegation and Pelissier still managed to get a tune out of them. Enough of the squad (N'Dombélé, Manzala) are still young enough to hope for improvement, but 17<sup>th</sup> would be a near-miracle at this point.

**Predicted Position:** 18<sup>TH</sup>



# ANGERS SCO

## Angers SCO: Likely XI



## Angers SCO: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	12th	46
2015/2016	Ligue 1	9th	50
2014/2015	Ligue 2	3rd	64
2013/2014	Ligue 2	9th	55
2012/2013	Ligue 2	5th	61

## Angers SCO: Key Man

### BAPTISTE SANTAMARIA

The young midfielder arrived without much fanfare from Tours last season; little was expected of him and even with the departure of Romain Saiss, the experienced Jamel Saihi looked more likely to be a like-for-like replacement. In the end, it was Santamaria who replaced Saiss, far exceeding expectations as he featured in all but one of Le Sco's matches.

Used in a box-to-box role in Ligue 2, Santamaria handled the transition to a more defensive role with aplomb, offering a massive step up from Saiss in terms of his dribbling abilities, mobility and range of passing, becoming the catalyst for Angers playing a more positive style.

While he could stand to be a little more imposing physically, at just 22, his wealth of experience in the lower leagues and maturity were key in Angers not suffering too much despite their departures, and this season he looks to be the unquestioned centerpiece of Stéphane Moulin's 4-1-4-1, allowing the team's attacking players even greater freedom.



# ANGERS SCO

## Angers SCO: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Denis Petric	GK	Serbian	29	2015/2016	ESTAC Troyes
Alexandre Letellier	GK	French	26	2010/2011	PSG B
Mathieu Michel	GK	French	25	2016/2017	Nimes
Yoann Andreu	LB	French	28	2015/2016	Gazélec Ajaccio
Saliou Ciss	LB	Senegalese	27	2017/2018	Valenciennes
Romain Thomas	CB	French	29	2013/2014	Carquefou
Ismael Traore	CB	Ivorian	30	2015/2016	Stade Brestois
Mateo Pavlovic	CB	Croatian	27	2016/2017	Werder Bremen
Mehdi Tahrat	CB/DM	Algerian	27	2016/2017	Red Star FC
Vincent Manceau	RB	French	28	2008/2009	-
Aissa Laïdouni	RB	French	20	2016/2017	-
Abdoulaye Bamba	RB	Ivorian	27	2016/2017	Dijon FCO
Thomas Mangani	CM	French	30	2015/2016	Chievo Verona
Baptiste Santamaria	CM/DM	French	22	2016/2017	Tours FC
Angelo Fulgini	CM/RW	French	20	2017/2018	Valenciennes
Lassana Coulibaly	CM	Malian	21	2017/2018	SC Bastia
Flavien Tait	AM	French	24	2016/2017	Chateauroux
Pierrick Capelle	LW/LB	French	30	2015/2016	Clermont
Gilles Sunu	LW/RW	French	26	2015/2016	Evian TG
Billy Ketkeophomphone	LW/RW	French	27	2015/2016	Tours FC
Wilfried Kanga	RW	Ivorian	19	2017/2018	PSG B
Karl Toko Ekambi	ST/LW	Cameroonian	23	2016/2017	FC Sochaux
Loic Puyo	LW/CM	French	28	2017/2018	AS Nancy Lorraine
Baptiste Guillaume	ST	Belgian	22	2017/2018	Lille OSC
Enzo Crivelli	ST	French	22	2017/2018	Bordeaux
Stephane Moulin	Manager	French	49	2011/2012	SO Chatellerault
Said Chabane	President	Algerian	53	2011/2012	-



# ANGERS SCO

## Angers SCO: Squad Analysis

Angers somehow turned Nicolas Pépé, who, while talented, was not always a starter into €10m, and have been aggressive in re-investing it. Crivelli is the biggest arrival, but Angelo Fulgini, from Valenciennes, has a wealth of experience with France's various youth sides and the versatile Lassana Coulibaly has already earned his first caps from Mali, despite only turning 21 in April. Loic Puyo and Saliou Ciss are capable squad players, in on free transfers, and Angers have quietly had one of Ligue 1's better windows, at least on paper. While more focus has been on the attacking side of things in player movement, the team also retain their reliable centre back pairing of Romain Thomas and Ismael Traoré, who should provide a modicum of solidity. In attack, Karl Toko Ekambi looks set to build on an impressive run-in, while Billy Ketkeophomphone hopes to recover after missing the majority of the season with a knee injury.

### Strengths:

Romain Thomas and Ismael Traoré are another year older, but the two veteran centre backs have shown no signs of slowing down, even if they appeared to regress slightly last season. Angers were more attack-minded last season, and thus the team's defensive wobbles had more to do with a calamitous goalkeeping situation than the foibles of either centre back. The team will remain strong at set pieces, with Thomas Mangani one of the league's best dead-ball specialists and Crivelli and Guillaume offering additional targets. Both should do some distance to alleviate the departure of N'Doye whilst offering more mobility in attack. Vincent Manceau and Yoann Andreu may not be the most dynamic going forward, but their defensive capabilities will also be welcomed back; in general, the team's attacking ethos should be more effective ahead of an improved back line. Further forward, Karl Toko Ekambi looks an increasingly savvy purchase on the left, while the additions of Puyo and Coulibaly should give Moulin increased depth in central midfield.

### Weaknesses:

The team have three goalkeepers with Ligue 1 experience in Alexandre Letellier, Mathieu Michel and Denis Petric, but none of the trio exactly inspires confidence. Letellier seems set to be the starter for the time being, even if Michel is a more solid option, but the real issue for Angers looks to be depth. Yoann Andreu and Vincent Manceau are competent full backs, and their deputies, Saliou Ciss and Abdoulaye Bamba are also decent, but centrally Mateo Pavlovic is their only recognised centre back beyond Romain Thomas and Ismael Traoré. A similar issue looms in midfield; if Stéphane Moulin persists with a 4-1-4-1, the team will be overly reliant on Santamaria, but only Mehdi Tahrat is capable of playing in front of the back four among the team's other midfielders.

### Verdict:

The club did well to get the money that they did for Pépé and Diedhiou, and have been aggressive in re-investing it. They have brought in an intriguing quartet of young players (Crivelli, Coulibaly, Fulgini and Guillaume), but the loss of N'Doye will be a difficult one given not only his aerial ability but also his leadership. This said, Moulin, who replaces Christophe Galtier as Ligue 1's longest-tenured manager has handled instability well in years past, including numerous injuries and international absences last season. In addition to Moulin's experience, he has also demonstrated an ability to improve players; Karl Toko Ekambi and loanee Jonathan Bamba were the prime examples last season, and there is no reason to think he can't work similar magic on the likes of Coulibaly and Fulgini. Angers may struggle in the early going but should ultimately have another comfortable mid-table finish, with some regression in defense offset by a more fluid attack.

**P**REDICTED **P**OSITION: **12<sup>TH</sup>**



# AS MONACO

## AS Monaco: Likely XI



## AS Monaco: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	1st	95
2015/2016	Ligue 1	3rd	65
2014/2015	Ligue 1	3rd	71
2013/2014	Ligue 1	2nd	80
2012/2013	Ligue 2	1st	76

## AS Monaco: Key Man

**K**YLIAN **M**BAPPE

As impressive as Mbappé's previous season was in terms of goal-scoring, netting fifteen times in less than 1500 minutes in the league, there was more to his game than that, as he recorded eight assists as well.

Unlike Thomas Lemar, who led the team with ten, none of these were from dead balls, and the number was recorded in more than a thousand fewer minutes. Mbappé is talented, that is beyond doubt, but if Monaco are to have any hope of regaining any of the glories of last season, he will need to continue to approach the game in the same humble style, working as hard to create as he does to score.

Still just 18, Mbappé never seemed to flag last season, but he was also benefitting from "the book" on him being written, and able to take some sides by surprise. How he responds to that and to the pressures that he faced this summer regarding any of a number of transfer moves will be the true mark of his ability to lead this team.



# AS MONACO

## AS Monaco: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Seydou Sy	GK	Sengalese	21	2014/2015	-
Diego Benaglio	GK	Swiss	33	2017/2018	Wolfsburg
Loic Badashile	GK	French	19	2016/2018	-
Danijel Subasic	GK	Croatian	32	2011/2012	Hajduk Split
Jorge	LB	Brazilian	21	2016/2017	Flamengo
Julien Serrano	LB	French	19	2017/2018	-
Kamil Glik	CB	Polish	29	2016/2017	Torino
Terence Kongolo	CB/LB	Dutch	23	2017/2018	Feyenoord
Andrea Raggi	CB/LB/RB	Italian	33	2012/2013	Bologna
Jemerson	CB	Brazilian	24	2015/2016	Atletico Mineiro
Almamy Toure	RB	French	21	2014/2015	-
Djibril Sidibe	RB	French	24	2016/2017	Lille OSC
Fabinho	DM/RB	Brazilian	23	2013/2014	Rio Ave
Soualiho Meité	DM	French	23	2015/2016	Zulte Waregem
Kévin N'Doram	DM/CB	French	21	2016/2017	-
Youri Tielemans	DM/CM	Belgian	20	2017/2018	Anderlecht
Joao Moutinho	CM	Portuguese	30	2013/2014	FC Porto
Youssef Ait Bennasser	CM/DM	Moroccan	21	2016/2017	Nancy
Adama Traore	AM/LW	Malian	22	2015/2016	Lille OSC
Thomas Lemar	LW	French	21	2015/2016	SM Caen
Gabriel Boschilia	LW	Brazilian	21	2015/2016	Sao Paulo
Kylian Mbappé	ST/LW	French	18	2015/2016	-
Gil Dias	LW	Portuguese	20	2015/2016	Braga
Rony Lopes	RW/AM	Portuguese	21	2015/2016	Manchester City
Allan Saint-Maximin	RW/LW	French	20	2015/2016	Saint-Étienne
Jordi Mboula	RW	Spanish	18	2017/2018	Barcelona
Guido Carrillo	ST	Argentinian	26	2015/2016	Estudiantes
Falcao	ST	Colombian	31	2013/2014	Atletico Madrid
Leonardo Jardim	Manager	Portuguese	42	2012/2013	Sporting Lisbon
Dimitri Rybolovlev	President	Russian	49	2011/2012	-





# AS MONACO

## AS Monaco: Squad Analysis

Much has been made of how Monaco have been gutted, with the big-money departures of Bakayoko, Silva and Benjamin Mendy foremost among those discussions. Beyond those three, though, the losses of Nabil Dirar and Valere Germain shouldn't be taken lightly either – both provided capable depth as Jardim competed on four fronts for much of the season. Experienced players will be joining the team to some degree in the form of loan returnees, but players like Rony Lopes and Allan Saint-Maximin, despite their abilities, still have a fair distance to go to play on the level of the likes of those who have moved on. The players that have been purchased, including Dutch defender Terence Kongolo and Barcelona academy product Jordi Mboula, are similarly intriguing, and Kongolo is a senior international, but all will be playing in a new and more demanding league. That said, Monaco have retained Mbappé, Lemar, Falcao, Fabinho and Kamil Glik, meaning that although important players have left, a larger number remain; the team are unlikely to repeat as champions, but they remain a dangerous proposition in Europe.

### Strengths:

In a word (or two), Leonardo Jardim. The Portuguese initially made his mark with Monaco by playing a rather dour brand of counter-attacking football three years ago, recording a surprise result over Arsenal in the Champions' League. After an unsettled season in 2015-16, he radically re-worked his team to play a driven, attack-minded 4-4-2 that seemed to score at will, playing an uncompromising style of football no matter the opponent. He has valued defensive solidity, making the signing of Kamil Glik a priority last summer. More importantly, he has kept Monaco competitive even in the face of an unceasing churn of (mostly young) players, no small feat. Changing tactics to suit his personnel season-to-season and improving his cadre of youngsters with regularity, Jardim has been a hot property this summer, and more than Mbappé or Fabinho, the club should count themselves lucky to have kept their manager. Personnel-wise, the centre back partnership of Kamil Glik and Jemerson looks as solid as ever, while Falcao and Mbappé are no less potent up top. Tielemans must prove himself, but he and Fabinho also boast huge potential if Jardim does continue with a flat 4-4-2.

### Weaknesses:

Monaco aren't necessarily weak in any department, save perhaps left-back, where Jorge, a young Brazilian brought in last January, looks to be the favorite to replace Benjamin Mendy. Kongolo is also capable of playing on the flank, as is Djibril Sidibé, who deferred to Sebastien Corchia for an extended period at Lille. Right midfield, though, is also a question, as Jardim's nominal options for replacing Silva are currently Lopes and Saint-Maximin. Both played plenty of first-team football on loan last season, but neither have the poise and overall intelligence of Silva, nor his ability to be effective in different positions on the pitch. Lopes has the upper hand for the time being, but neither player looks set to take the Champions' League by storm. There is also the elephant in the room, Djibril Sidibé. A full international, he remains a massive liability defensively, especially behind whoever replaces Silva. Some have even suggested that he is the best option at left back merely for the fact that Almamy Touré is a more solid defensive option in his stead. In any event, Monaco could probably do with a bit more investment before the window shuts, but they will be operating on a decent level, if a step down from that of last year at most positions.

### Verdict:

The dissolution of Monaco's brilliant attacking side will surely be met with some hand-wringing, but the same thing was said in 2015, when the team lost far more players than this edition and still finished third...

**Predicted Position: 2<sup>ND</sup>**



# BORDEAUX

## Girondins de Bordeaux: Likely XI



## Bordeaux: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	6th	59
2015/2016	Ligue 1	11th	50
2014/2015	Ligue 1	6th	63
2013/2014	Ligue 1	7th	53
2012/2013	Ligue 1	7th	55

## Girondins de Bordeaux: Key Man

### GAETAN LABORDE

The powerful but mobile striker proved a revelation once he was installed as the starter, notching thirteen goals across all competitions last season.

His intelligence and movement were key in improved performances from wide men Francois Kamano and Malcom, and he also linked well with midfielder Valentín Vada, allowing Bordeaux to play some of the league's most attractive football.

However, while he was able to take Ligue 1 by surprise to some degree last year, this year Bordeaux, and Laborde in particular, after an accomplished 2017, will have more of a target on their backs.

It will be imperative that Laborde remains hungry in the absence of much competition (Jérémy Ménéz has moved on, and Diego Rolan seems likely to follow suit); complacency looks to be the only potential stumbling block for Laborde, whose goals will be imperative as a restructured defence sorts itself out.





# BORDEAUX

## Girondins de Bordeaux: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Benoit Costil	GK	French	30	2017/2018	Stade Rennais
Jerome Prior	GK	French	21	2014/2015	-
Gaetan Poussin	GK	French	18	2017/2018	-
Maxime Poundje	LB	French	24	2011/2012	-
Diego Contento	LB	German	27	2014/2015	Bayern Munich
Theo Pellenard	LB/CB	French	23	2014/2015	-
Vukasin Jovanovic	CB	Serbian	21	2016/2017	Zenit S. Petersburg
Igor Lewczuk	CB	Polish	32	2016/2017	Legia Warsaw
Olivier Verdon	CB	Beninese	21	2017/2018	-
Milan Gajic	RB	Serbian	19	2015/2016	OFK Belgrade
Frédéric Guilbert	RB	French	22	2015/2016	-
Youssef Sabaly	RB	French	24	2016/2017	PSG
Jeremy Toulalan	DM/CB	French	32	2016/2017	AS Monaco
Mauro Arambarri	DM	Uruguayan	21	2015/2016	Defensor
Jaroslav Plasil	CM	Czech	35	2009/2010	Osasuna
Younousse Sankharé	CM/DM	Senegalese	27	2016/2017	Lille OSC
Lukas Lerager	CM	Danish	24	2017/2018	Zulte Waregem
Daniel Mancini	CM	Argentina	20	2016/2017	Newell's Old Boys
Valentin Vada	CM	Argentinian	21	2014/2015	-
Younes Kaabouni	AM	French	22	2013/2014	-
Malcom	LW	Brazilian	20	2015/2016	Corinthians
Francois Kamano	RW/ST	Guinean	21	2016/2017	SC Bastia
Diego Rolan	ST	Uruguayan	24	2012/2013	Defensor
Alexandre Mendy	ST	French	23	2017/2018	EA Guingamp
Gaetan Laborde	ST	French	23	2013/2014	-
Thomas Touré	LW	French	23	2014/2015	-
Jocelyn Gourvennec	Manager	French	45	2016/2017	EA Guingamp
Stephane Martin	President	French	46	2016/2017	-



# BORDEAUX

## Girondins de Bordeaux: Squad Analysis

Bordeaux may not have seemed all that busy this summer based on the lineups that they've trotted out in friendlies and their first European match, but to take that tack would be selling the team's management short. In addition to Costil, Youssouf Sabaly was signed on a permanent deal from Paris Saint-Germain, while another loanee, young Serbian centre back Vukasin Jovanovic also made his switch permanent. Danish midfielder Lukas Lerager also arrived from Belgian side Zulte Waregem, and already looks strong competition for Valentin Vada, while Alexandre Mendy can play the target man role after his move from Guingamp. One key move that shouldn't go unnoticed is that of Jérémy Toulalan being converted to centre back. The former Lyon man has played in defence on occasion in years past, but he currently appears ready to cede his position at the base of midfield to a younger player, with the Uruguayan Mauro Arambarri looking the favorite for the time being. Toulalan's range of passing and cool head could be an improvement on Nicolas Pallois, who is off to Nantes, but the back four is still a work in progress; the season's early going will likely see the attack be relied on to carry the team as the defence settles in.

### Strengths:

Gourvennec, whose achievements in Europe and the Coupe de France with Guingamp are the stuff of legend is easily the team's strongest asset. He took a while to get settled last season, but his adaptations, both tactically and personnel-wise, struck the right notes, while demonstrating his desire for all players to put in the required effort, seen with his benching of Contento and Adam Ounas. More than an iron fist, though, Gourvennec has also shown himself to be a remarkable steward of young players, an impressive turnabout from a manager who relied heavily on veterans during his time in Brittany. He has also installed an attacking mentality, something that is too rare in Ligue 1 of late, encouraging his young squad's improvement by allowing them to take chances going forward, with Laborde, Malcom and Kamano the primary beneficiaries of this.

### Weaknesses:

Toulalan, 34 in September, has done well to accept a new role; his mobility is no longer what it was, and playing Lerager or Younousse Sankharé there in his stead would rob Bordeaux of much of their dynamism in midfield. Jaroslav Plasil has played there on occasion, but is even older than Toulalan and not a real solution. The role of protecting that potentially shaky defence, then, goes to Arambarri, a combative presence with a raft of experience in Uruguay's domestic leagues but a player who's not made much of an impression in France. It will be a big ask for the youngster, who has been handed the number eight shirt, an appropriate designation for a player who has good defensive instincts but can also move with the ball at his feet. If he lives up to his billing, Bordeaux can be even more dynamic in midfield, but he could also leave the team in a bind if he is unable to adapt. Doubts also remain about Diego Contento, particularly his attention to detail in defence, but with Maxime Poudjé fit and Théo Pellenard more experienced, the former Bayern man will find himself under considerable pressure.

### Verdict:

Bordeaux are operating under the axiom if it is not broken, then don't fix it. There remain some doubts over the quality of the centre backs, even with Toulalan effectively replacing Pallois, but the arrival of Benoit Costil on a free is huge coup, and the sometimes-iffy defence should improve with his arrival, making anything less than a repeat performance of last year a disappointment.

**P**REDICTED **P**OSITION: **4<sup>TH</sup>**



# CAEN

## SM Caen: Likely XI



## SM Caen: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	17th	37
2015/2016	Ligue 1	7th	54
2014/2015	Ligue 1	13th	46
2013/2014	Ligue 2	3rd	64
2012/2013	Ligue 2	4th	63

## SM Caen: Key Man

# RONNY RODELIN

The lanky former Lille man has been a revelation since moving Caen first on loan, and then permanently. Flourishing in Patrice Garande's aggressive counter-attacking systems, he has become one of Ligue 1's most impressive players, maintaining an impressive level of consistency, even in sometimes adverse circumstances.

His nineteen goals have been key in helping Caen stave off relegation, but more importantly, his creativity and versatility have meant that despite a fair amount of flux around him, Rodelin has been able to adapt to different systems and teammates without missing a beat.

This is a far cry from his uncomfortable spell at Lille, where he was often used as a target man to poor effect. Now, Rodelin can play that role but also affect a match with the ball at his feet, setting up more natural goal-scorers like Andy Delort or Ivan Santini. Caen, in holding on to Garande, Rodelin and Santini, will have more than a fair share at keeping their Ligue 1 status this year, despite barely scraping safety in 2016-17.



# CAEN

## SM Caen: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Remy Vercoutre	GK	French	37	2014/2015	Olympique Lyonnais
Matthieu Dreyer	GK	French	28	2016/2017	ESTAC Troyes
Brice Samba	GK	French	23	2017/2018	Marseille
Emmanuel Imorou	LB	French	28	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Adama Mbengué	LB	Senegalese	23	2017/2018	Diambars
Vincent Bessat	LB	French	31	2015/2016	FC Nantes
Alexander Djiku	CB/RB	French	22	2017/2018	SC Bastia
Romain Genevois	CB	French	29	2016/2017	OGC Nice
Damien da Silva	CB	French	29	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Florian Le Joncour	CB	French	22	2015/2016	Concarneau
Mouhamadou Dabo	RB	French	29	2016/2017	ESTAC Troyes
Frédéric Guilbert	RB	French	22	2016/2017	Girondins de Bordeaux
Baissama Sankoh	DM/CB	Guinean	25	2017/2018	EA Guingamp
Valentin Voisin	DM	French	21	2016/2017	-
Ismael Diomande	DM	Ivorian	24	2016/2017	AS Saint-Étienne
Durel Avounou	CM/DM	Congolese	19	2017/2018	-
Jonathan Delaplace	CM	French	31	2015/2016	Lille OSC
Jordan Leborgne	CM	French	21	2015/2016	-
Stef Peeters	CM	Belgian	25	2017/2018	Sint-Truiden
Julien Feret	AM	French	35	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Jordan N'Kololo	AM	Congolese	24	2015/2016	Clermont Foot
Jeff Louis	AM	Haitian	24	2015/2016	Standard Liege
Christian Kouakou	LW	Ivorian	26	2015/2016	Tours FC
Herve Bazile	LW/RW	Haitian	27	2014/2015	Poire-sur-Vie
Ronny Rodelin	RW/ST	French	27	2016/2017	LOSC Lille
Yann Karamoh	RW/ST	French	19	2016/2017	-
Ivan Santini	ST	Croatian	28	2016/2017	Standard Liege
Patrice Garande	Manager	French	56	2012/2013	AS Cherbourg
Jean-Francois Fortin	President	French	70	2002/2003	-



# CAEN

## SM Caen: Squad Analysis

Caen, despite losing promising youngster Jean-Victor Makengo to Nice, have quietly had one of Ligue 1's better summers. The arrivals of Stef Peeters, Alexander Djiku and Baïssama Sankoh have made the team younger and quicker. Add in promising young 'keeper Brice Samba, signed from Marseille on a free to provide competition for the aging Rémy Vercoutre, as well as the permanent arrival of Frédéric Guilbert from Bordeaux and Caen have definitively improved their squad. Keeping Ronny Rodelin and Ivan Santini has been key, but the departures of the likes of Yahia, Nicolas Seube and Steed Malbranque will also provide more opportunities to the youngsters Valentin Voisin and Durel Avounou, both highly-regarded academy products. Pape Sané has been loaned out again, so there are doubts about depth at centre forward, but Christian Kouakou has had a decent loan spell at Nimes and could yet play an important role this season. Continued reliance on Julien Féret could be problematic as the captain recently turned 35, but overall, Caen look sharper and younger, a welcome change from recent seasons.

### Strengths:

Despite his almost seeing Caen relegated, the Norman club have retained the services of Patrice Garande, which may be the biggest key in their battle to retain their top-flight status. Some may see this as a case of "better the devil you know," but the veteran manager has an uncanny knack at getting results from his team when they are seemingly behind the eight ball. The final-day draw at Paris Saint-Germain was perhaps most emblematic of this last season, but there were also a pair of consecutive 1-0 wins over Nancy and Saint-Étienne in February that dragged Caen away from the drop, as well as unlikely victories over Lyon and Nice. On the pitch, the team's full-backs look particularly impressive, as the dogged Bessat and the powerful Guilbert give Caen an underrated but potent pair of players, equally comfortable playing in a four or as wing-backs in a 3-5-2. Up front, Rodelin and Santini are each capable of turning a match on its head in short order, meaning that Caen will rarely be without opportunities in a given match.

### Weaknesses:

As inspirational as Garande can be, though, his players, while enthusiastic, often seem to play with a lack of attention to detail, or much discipline, a pair of often-fatal characteristics. As the manager, he must take responsibility for this, but has avoided being dismissed, even as Caen have turned in some truly woeful stretches of play. Rémy Vercoutre has generally looked solid since departing Lyon for Normandy, but he may have begun to show his age last season, looking culpable on several occasions. An injury-hit back line won't have helped matters, nor will the team's generally playing without an orthodox defensive midfielder, but still, the veteran 'keeper could be even more of a liability this season. The arrival of Samba should put pressure on him, but there is also the potential for that move to backfire; Vercoutre doesn't have the reputation of a malcontent, but he could bristle at seemingly being put out to pasture before his time.

### Verdict:

After generally praising Caen's moves, why are they then being tipped for relegation becomes the natural question? The fact of the matter is that, despite seeming improvements, Garande's style of play remains a risky one; Caen had the league's third-worst defence last year, and while Djiku and Sankoh will be upgrades on the players that they replaced, they are far from world-beaters.

**PREDICTED POSITION: 19<sup>TH</sup>**



# DIJON FCO

## Dijon FCO: Likely XI



## Dijon FCO: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	16th	37
2015/2016	Ligue 2	2nd	70
2014/2015	Ligue 2	4th	61
2013/2014	Ligue 2	6th	57
2012/2013	Ligue 2	7th	59

## Dijon FCO: Key Man

### BAPTISTE REYNET

It's never going to be an easy season for a team whose most important player is their goalkeeper, but in Baptiste Reynet, Dijon have one of Ligue 1's more underrated players.

Frustrated at Lorient, Reynet has shown great character with a move down to Ligue 2 with Dijon, winning a place that division's team of the year before impressing last season, turning in a number of crucial saves as the club staved off relegation without sacrificing their attacking style of play.

With a renewed emphasis on defence in the transfer window, this season could see something different from Olivier Dall'Oglio's side, but Reynet is unlikely to have an easy time of it whether he's securing a 3-2 win or a scoreless draw.

If he can continue with the form he demonstrated in the season of Dijon's promotion and last year, there should be just about enough left in attack to see safety achieved once more, but if not, it could be a very long campaign at the Stade Gaston-Gérard.





# DIJON FCO

## Dijon FCO: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Baptiste Reynet	GK	French	26	2015/2016	FC Lorient
Benjamin Leroy	GK	French	28	2016/2017	Evian TG FC
Arnold Bouka Moutou	LB	Congolese	28	2016/2017	Angers SCO
Oussama Haddadi	LB	Tunisian	25	2015/2016	Club Africain
Wesley Lautoa	CB	French	29	2017/2018	Lorient
Cédric Yambéré	CB	French	26	2017/2018	Bordeaux
Cedric Varrault	CB	French	37	2011/2012	Panionios
Fouad Chafik	RB	Moroccan	30	2016/2017	Stade Lavallois
Vincent Rufli	RB	Swiss	29	2016/2017	FC Sion
Valentin Rosier	RB	French	20	2016/2017	Rodez AF
Jordan Marie	DM	French	25	2013/2014	-
Erwan Maury	DM	French	21	2015/2016	-
Mehdi Abeid	CM	Algerian	24	2016/2017	Panathanaikos
Florent Balmont	CM	French	37	2016/2017	Lille OSC
Anthony Belmonte	CM	French	21	2015/2016	FC Istres
Frederic Sammaritano	LW	French	31	2015/2016	AJ Auxerre
Naim Sliti*	LW	Tunisian	26	2017/2018	Lille OSC
Dylan Bahamboula	AM	Congolese	22	2016/2017	AS Monaco
Chang-Hoon Kwon	LW/AM	Korean	23	2016/2017	Suwon Bluewings
Romain Amalfitano	RW/CM	French	27	2014/2015	Dijon FCO
Julio Tavares	ST	Cape Verdean	28	2012/2013	Bourg-Peronnas
Benjamin Jeannot	ST	French	25	2017/2018	FC Lorient
Wesley Said	ST/LW	French	22	2017/2018	Stade Rennais
Olivier Dall'Oglio	Manager	French	53	2012/2013	Olympique Ales
Olivier Declourt	President	French	50	2012/2013	-



# DIJON FCO

## Dijon FCO: Squad Analysis

After knocking on the door of promotion for several seasons, Dijon finally did enough to make the jump to Ligue 1 two seasons ago, and were easily the most impressive of the promoted sides last year, even if Metz did finish ahead of them. The team's unheralded (save Florent Balmont and Cédric Varrault) squad played attractive, cohesive, attacking football, spearheaded by the relationship between Lois Diony and Julio Tavares. Diony and attacking midfielder Pierre Lees-Melou have departed, and while Sliti and the two new strikers could yet see success, it is obvious that Dall'Oglio will operate with a slightly more negative mindset this season, relying as much on the two full-backs, Fouad Chafik and Oussama Haddadi, as any of the nominal attacking players. That is not to say that Kwon Chang-hoon, Naïm Sliti and Frédéric Sammaritano are too poor to succeed at this level, only that the manager may opt to be more prudent, something evinced further by the signings of Wesley Lutoa and Cédric Yambéré, two experienced centre backs.

### Strengths:

Chafik can fairly claim to be one of Ligue 1's more underrated right-backs, earning himself a late-career call-up to the Moroccan national team, despite only having played less than a full campaign in the top flight. Along with January arrival Haddadi, Dijon could rival Montpellier for the best full-back pairing among the bottom half of the league. Each of the two offers strength and tenacity, and while they are adept going forward, their real strength lies in their positional responsibility and attention to detail. Baptiste Reynet, as previously mentioned, doesn't have the best statistics, but playing behind a shaky defence will make many a 'keeper look poorer than they are. His continued improvement will undoubtedly be an asset as Dijon chase a third season in the top flight. Finally, Dall'Oglio himself has similarly impressed, showing a willingness to be positive both in his actions and his tactics, staying true to his principles without sacrificing the team's ability to compete.

### Weaknesses:

As adept and complete a set of players as the full-backs are, there are equally perturbing doubts over the centre backs. Cédric Varrault has been generally reliable, but at 37, his usefulness has started to wane. With Jordan Loties and Yunis Abdelhamid departing, the team brought in Yambéré and Lutoa. The latter should start from the off, while Varrault could hold off the former Bordeaux man, but even with their experience, a more relevant detail would be a lack of success from both of the new arrivals; Lutoa was a key component of one of Ligue 1's worst defences a year ago, and Yambéré has barely had a look in recent seasons despite Bordeaux being far from a defensive juggernaut, spending time last season on loan abroad. Questions also will plague the centre forwards; Julio Tavares is a powerful player, but he might not be first choice, as Benjamin Jeannot and Wesley Said, the new arrivals, look set to partner. Both have been highly regarded at points, but have struggled to produce at Ligue 1 level.

### Verdict:

Dijon were lightly regarded this time last season and Dall'Oglio, who has been in charge for five seasons at this point, once again worked his magic; only Montpellier scored more goals outside of the top six. The defence remains a work in progress, but even with doubts surrounding the centre backs, Dijon should have more than enough to stay in Ligue 1, especially given the lack of quality among this year's promoted sides.

**P**REDICTED **P**OSITION: **15<sup>TH</sup>**



## EA Guingamp: Likely XI



## EA Guingamp: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	10th	50
2015/2016	Ligue 1	16th	44
2014/2015	Ligue 1	10th	49
2013/2014	Ligue 1	16th	42
2012/2013	Ligue 2	2nd	70

## EA Guingamp: Key Man

### JIMMY BRIAND

The veteran striker celebrated his 32nd birthday in the days before the season kicks off, but he has yet to show any signs of slowing down, setting a career high in goals last season with 12.

More than his creativity and finishing, which remain above-average for Ligue 1, the former Rennes and Lyon player has also looked a natural leader, becoming an easy choice to wear the armband for Antoine Kombouaré. This represents a marked change from the sometimes-petulant player that we saw at Lyon, and the Breton side have been all the better for it.

Guingamp did admittedly fall off a bit under a raft of injuries in the run-in, but that they maintained a challenge for European football for as long as they did is in large part down to Briand.

The team is largely the same, but although depth will be a concern, Briand's experience and finishing will be essential if the team are to finish above the relegation scrap.



# GUINGAMP

## EA Guingamp: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Marc-Aurele Caillard	GK	French	23	2017/2018	Clermont
Karl-Johan Johnsson	GK	Swedish	27	2016/2017	Randers FC
Franck Tabanou	LB	French	28	2017/2018	Swansea City
Pedro Rebocho	LB	Portuguese	22	2017/2018	SL Benfica
Jeremy Sorbon	CB	French	33	2013/2014	SM Caen
Felix Eboa Eboa	CB	Cameroonian	20	2017/2018	PSG B
Christophe Kerbrat	CB	French	31	2011/2012	Plabennec
Jordan Ikoko	RB	French	23	2016/2017	PSG
Jonathan Martins Pereira	RB	French	31	2015/2016	ESTAC Troyes
Lebogang Phiri	DM/CM	South African	22	2017/2018	Brondby
Mustapha Diallo	DM/CM	Senegalese	31	2009/2010	ASC Diaraf
Lucas Deaux	DM/CM	French	28	2016/2017	KAA Gent
Ludovic Blas	CM/RW	French	19	2015/2016	-
Etienne Didot	CM	French	34	2016/2017	Toulouse FC
Yannis Salibur	LW	French	26	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Thibault Giresse	LW	French	36	2009/2010	Toulouse FC
Nicolas Benezet	LW	French	26	2015/2016	Evian TG FC
Abdoul Camara	LW/RW	Guinean	27	2017/2018	Derby County
Marcus Coco	RW	French	21	2014/2015	-
Jimmy Briand	ST	French	31	2015/2016	Hannover 96
Sloan Privat	ST	French	28	2015/2016	Gent
Marcus Thuram	ST	French	19	2017/201	FC Sochaux
Karim Achahbar	ST	Moroccan	21	2015/2016	-
Antoine Kombouaré	Manager	French	53	2016/2017	RC Lens
Bertrand Desplat	President	French	47	2010/2011	-



# GUINGAMP

## EA Guingamp: Squad Analysis

Guingamp have become younger in this window, and that is decidedly a good thing. Jérémy Sorbon and Christophe Kerbrat aren't exactly spring chickens in defence, but the departures of the likes of Mathieu Bodmer and Reynald Lemaitre will allow more opportunities for the team's academy graduates as well as summer signings Lebogang Phiri and Félix Eboa Eboa. Add in the former Benfica left back Pedro Rebocho and Thuram, and Guingamp's focus on young players, in concert with the talents of Kombouaré could make the Breton side a must-watch outfit. Veteran players have arrived as well, with Abdoul Camara seeking a chance at redemption after leaving Angers for Derby and Franck Tabanou another player who returns to England having been humbled by his time across the channel. The team will miss the departed Marçal, now with Lyon and the depth provided by the likes of Nill De Pauw and Baissama Sankoh, but now instead of being a team of wily veterans, Guingamp look a side for the future, something that has often borne fruit in Ligue 1.

### Strengths:

Antoine Kombouaré is lightly regarded abroad, but for those in the know about French football, he is one of the country's better managers. Unfairly dismissed from Paris Saint-Germain as the Qatari owners pursued a "name" manager, he has overseen the development of a number of talented players in his spells at other clubs, including Wylan Cyprien, Kévin Gameiro and Mamadou Sakho. His stewardship of Ludovic Blas and Marcus Coco looks promising thus far, and he should allow the aforementioned youngsters a similarly long leash so long as relegation isn't a threat. Beyond Kombouaré, the team, in the form of Briand, the centre backs, and midfielders Lucas Deaux and Moustapha Diallo, have a host of players who are vastly experienced without being over the hill. No small thing in what seems to be an unpredictable season, these veteran players and their leadership should be massive for a side which will look to work in its young prospects as much as possible.

### Weaknesses:

As experienced as Deaux, Diallo and company are, there is still something lacking from their play in attacking phases. Blas has proved something of an antidote to that, but is probably best used wide on the right of a three than as a central midfielder. This lack of creativity in central areas means that Guingamp often relied heavily on their fullbacks for attacking impetus last season. Marçal was superb in that regard, but the jury remains out on Jordan Ikoko; while Rebocho has an impressive pedigree, he still needs to prove he can make the step up to Ligue 1, although early returns have been promising. The team also look to be a little thin in central defense; Sorbon and Kerbrat are capable enough, and Lucas Deaux can do a job there as well, but Eboa Eboa is the team's only recognized centre back aside from the two veterans, each of whom have missed time with injuries in the recent past.

### Verdict:

Given the investment at Rennes, Marseille and Lille, it would be foolish to expect Guingamp to compete for European football, but should one or more of last year's top six (Bordeaux? Nice? Lyon?) struggle to balance the demands of an extra competition, the team undoubtedly have the tools to push their rivals in this regard. They are never going to be a Monaco, but nor are they going to play route one football, remaining an attractive option for the neutral, particularly if the team's raft of youngsters continue to improve.

**PREDICTED POSITION: 10<sup>TH</sup>**



# LILLE

# OSC

## Lille OSC: Likely XI



## Lille OSC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	11th	46
2015/2016	Ligue 1	5th	60
2014/2015	Ligue 1	8th	56
2013/2014	Ligue 1	3rd	71
2012/2013	Ligue 1	6th	62

## Lille OSC: Key Man

# MIKE MAIGNAN

Lille have had a strong tradition of goalkeepers in the recent past, with Vincent Enyeama having succeeded Mickael Landreau, giving *Les Dogues* nearly an unbroken decade of experience on both the European and international levels. Enyeama is still only 34 and signed a contract extension until 2019 somewhat recently, but he finished last season injured, allowing the youngster Mike Maignan a chance to show what he could do.

Ahead of the upcoming season, Maignan has retained his role as first choice, perhaps partly due to new manager Marcelo Bielsa wanting to stamp his authority on the team but also as a result of his promise, having been a regular for France's various youth sides.

Under Bielsa, the team have spent heavily this summer, bringing in a host of highly-touted foreign players; finishing in the European places seems the immediate goal, but that will prove difficult if Maignan is unable to display suitable levels of consistency and quality in goal.



# LILLE OSC

## Lille OSC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Vincent Enyeama	GK	Nigerian	34	2012/2013	Hapoel Tel Aviv
Mike Maignan	GK	French	22	2015/2016	PSG
Adam Jakubec	GK	Slovakian	20	2017/2018	Spartak Trnava
Hervé Kouakou Koffi	GK	Burkinabe	20	2017/2018	ASEC Mimosas
Hamza Mendyl	LB	Moroccan	19	2016/2017	-
Fodé Ballo-Touré	LB	French	20	2017/2018	PSG B
Edgar Ié	CB/RB	Portuguese	23	2017/2018	Belenenses
Junior Alonso	CB/LB	Paraguayan	24	2016/2017	Cerro Porteno
Adama Soumaoro	CB	French	25	2011/2012	-
Kouadio-Yves Dabila	CB	Ivorian	20	2017/2018	AS Monaco
Kévin Malcuit	RB	French	26	2017/2018	AS Saint-Étienne
Thiago Mendes	DM	Brazilian	25	2017/2018	Sao Paulo
Ibrahim Amadou	DM	French	24	2015/2016	AS Nancy
Thiago Maia	CM	Brazilian	20	2017/2018	Santos
Xeka	CM/DM	Portuguese	22	2016/2017	Braga
Yves Bissouma	CM/RW	Malian	33	2016/2017	-
Fares Bahlouli	AM	French	22	2016/2017	AS Monaco
Marvin Martin	AM	French	29	2012/2013	Sochaux
Chahreddine Boukholda	AM	French	21	2017/2018	AS Monaco B
Lenny Nangis	LW/ST	French	23	2015/2016	SM Caen
Luiz Araujo	LW	Brazilian	20	2017/2018	Sao Paulo
Martin Terrier	LW	French	20	2016/2017	-
Junior Tallo	ST	Ivorian	23	2015/2016	AS Roma
Anwar El Ghazi	RW	Dutch	22	2016/2017	Ajax
Nicolas Pepé	RW	Ivorian	22	2017/2018	Angers SCO
Yassine Benzia	ST/AM	French	22	2015/2016	Olympique Lyonnais
Nicolas De Preville	ST	French	26	2016/2017	KV Oostende
Ezequiel Ponce*	ST	Argentine	20	2017/2018	AS Roma
Marcelo Bielsa	Manager	Argentinian	62	2017/2018	SS Lazio
Gérard Lopez	President	Spanish	45	2016/2017	Fola Esch



# LILLE OSC

## Lille OSC: Squad Analysis

With the sales of Rio Mavuba and Sébastien Corchia this summer, Lille's squad has been rendered essentially unrecognisable from the side that was eliminated in the Europa League a year ago. Heavy spending last January and this summer have seen the team, under the direction of Gerard Lopez, bring in a raft of younger foreign players, with Bielsa's leadership surely a part of the attraction. European-based players have also arrived, with Nicolas Pépé, Kévin Malcuit and Edgar Lé most prominent among them, but the focus has largely been on the aforementioned Brazilians, with Maia becoming the club's record signing. These players are undoubtedly talented, but largely callow, ready to be molded by Bielsa into a cohesive unit. The Argentine has rarely failed to deliver in the short term in this regard, and excitement is running high. There are questions about suitable back-ups for Nicolas de Préville and Mike Maignan but overall, Lille have constructed a wholly intriguing side with a good amount of depth that could well take Ligue 1 by surprise.

### Strengths:

Lille look strong in several areas, not least of which is central midfield. Thiago Maia and Mendes are the hotshot new arrivals, but don't discount Yves Bissouma, Ibrahim Amadou (who has been made captain in the team's pre-season matches) or Xeka, each of whom had their moments last season. Bissouma and Amadou are also capable of playing in different positions (on the wing and in central defence), but the quality and depth in the middle of the pitch for *Les Dogues* is impressive indeed. The wide attackers, with Luiz Araujo and Nicolas Pépé joining Anwar El Ghazi and youngster Martin Terrier also look a strong group, but the real strength of the side may lay off the pitch in the form of Bielsa. "El Loco" has had a trying time in the recent past, most notably with his absurdly short stint at Lazio, but there is no doubt his ability to improve young players ranks among the best in the game and most of Lille's lineups will have de Préville, 26, as the oldest player. If Bielsa puts anything close to the same work in as he did at Marseille and Bilbao, this team could contend for the Champions' League places as soon as this season.

### Weaknesses:

Bielsa seems to be shutting certain players (Eder, Julian Palmieri, Enyeama) out, and that could potentially lead to a void in leadership, as the team will thus lack players with experience in Ligue 1, a sometimes-underrated attribute. At this point, fans of the team should keep faith with the Argentine's methods, but it is still a massive undertaking to sculpt a competitive side from a massive influx of players. The talented but raw Maignan also stands as a potential weakness; there are few doubts about his ability, but he has yet to deal with the pressure of being an everyday no. 1. Similarly, left-back looks specious; former PSG youngster Fodé Ballo-Touré has been featured in the team's friendlies, while Moroccan Hamza Mendyl is also on the club's books, but if Palmieri isn't an option, Bielsa will be relying on an key position being staffed by a pair of players who have scarcely played professional football. Centre forward is somewhat of a concern as well; de Préville is talented but if Eder is forced out the club will similarly lack cover, unless Roma loanee Ezequiel Ponce is considered.

### Verdict:

Europe and a deep run in one of the cups should be the minimum for Lille this season, but don't rule out Bielsa's squad bettering that baseline.

**Predicted Position: 7<sup>TH</sup>**





# LYON

## Olympique Lyonnais: Likely XI



## Lyon: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	4th	67
2015/2016	Ligue 1	2nd	65
2014/2015	Ligue 1	2nd	75
2013/2014	Ligue 1	5th	61
2012/2013	Ligue 1	3rd	67

## Olympique Lyonnais: Key Man

# NABIL FEKIR

After taking Ligue 1 by storm in 2014-15 and cementing himself as not only a regular with the French national team but potentially a player around whom it could be constructed, the following season was less kind to Nabil Fékir.

An early-season ACL injury saw him miss the bulk of the campaign, and when Lyon managed to once again finish second without him, he was somewhat of a forgotten man. He returned last season, but often looked badly out of shape, disinterested or both. He has looked sharper and more fit in the team's pre-season friendlies, even if there remain questions over whether he plays as a striker, on the right, or as a playmaker.

Having seen his fellow academy graduates Corentin Tolisso and Alexandre Lacazette move to pastures greener this summer, Fékir must be aware of the expanded opportunities a strong season would present. That may seem a limited and even selfish way to look at Fékir's role, but the best way he can reach a measure of redemption is to put his head down and work to prove that last season was an aberration and not the beginning of a "what might have been" story.



# LYON

## Olympique Lyonnais: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Anthony Lopes	GK	Portuguese	26	2011/2012	-
Mathieu Gorgelin	GK	French	26	2011/2012	-
Lucas Mocio	GK	French	23	2014/2015	-
Fernando Marcal	LB	Brazilian	28	2017/2018	SL Benfica
Ferland Mendy	LB	French	22	2017/2018	Le Havre
Louis Nganioni	LB	French	22	2015/2016	-
Jeremy Morel	LB/CB	French	33	2015/2016	Olympique de Marseille
Mapou Yanga Mbiwa	CB	French	28	2015/2016	AS Roma
Mouctar Diakhaby	CB	French	20	2016/2017	-
Marcelo	CB	Brazilian	30	2017/2018	Besiktas
Nicolas N'Koulou	CB	Cameroonian	27	2016/2017	Olympique de Marseille
Emanuel Mammana	CB	Argentinian	21	2016/2017	River Plate
Rafael	RB	Brazilian	26	2015/2016	Manchester United
Kenny Tete	RB	Dutch	21	2017/2018	Ajax
Lucas Tousart	DM	French	20	2015/2016	Valenciennes FC
Jordan Ferri	CM	French	25	2012/2013	-
Sergi Darder	CM	Spanish	23	2015/2016	Malaga CF
Clement Grenier	CM	French	26	2008/2009	-
Houssem Aouar	AM/LW	French	19	2016/2017	-
Nabil Fekir	AM/ST	Algerian	24	2013/2014	-
Bertrand Traoré	RW/ST	Burkinabe	21	2017/2018	Chelsea
Memphis Depay	LW	Dutch	23	2016/2017	Manchester United
Mariano Diaz	ST	Dominican	23	2017/2018	Real Madrid
Maxwel Cornet	ST/LW/RW	French	19	2014/2015	FC Metz
Romain Del Castillo	ST	French	21	2016/2017	-
Myziane Maolida	ST	French	18	2017/2018	-
Alan Dzabana	ST	French	20	2017/2018	-
Bruno Genesio	Manager	French	50	2015/2016	-
Jean Michel Aulas	President	French	68	1987/1988	-





# LYON

## Olympique Lyonnais: Squad Analysis

Lyon's sales of Alexandre Lacazette and Corentin Tolisso have commanded the lion's share of the pre-season talk around the club, but one would be remiss in not also mentioning the departures of Mathieu Valbuena, who quietly enjoyed his best season in some time and Maxime Gonalons, the club's long-time captain. In new arrival Bertrand Traoré and young former Valenciennes midfielder Lucas Tousart, there appear to be ready-made replacements for the two, but how Lacazette's goals or Tolisso's all-around are replaced is another matter. Manager Bruno Génésio has been using a 4-2-3-1 with Sergi Darder partnering Tousart, but the youngster is the only midfielder in Lyon's squad with any defensive inclinations, leaving the team in peril were he to suffer a serious injury. Striker has similarly been ignored as Mariano Diaz and Traoré represent unproven if intriguing options.

### Strengths:

Lyon's new-look defence looks most impressive. Marcelo, signed from Besiktas, looks the ideal veteran presence to allow Mouctar Diakhaby to continue his already impressive development at centre back, putting an end to the failed tenure of Nicolas N'Koulou. The full-back positions look similarly improved, with a combination of former Benfica man Fernando Marçal an upgrade on Jérémy Morel at left back, with promising youngster Ferland Mendy waiting in the wings. On the opposite flank, Lyon returned once more to Ajax for Kenny Tete, who looks an enterprising understudy to Rafael. Lyon also have the always-excellent Anthony Lopes in goal and Memphis Depay and Bertrand Traoré looking sharp on the wings, as well as host of younger players eager to make their mark, including attacking midfielder Houssem Aouar. Lyon may take some time to come together, but the team's vaunted youth system still seems ready to bring through another talented group of players, even if patience must be the watchword this season.

### Weaknesses:

Lyon have a lot of intriguing pieces, but fans of the club should be most worried about replacing Lacazette's goals. The striker was remarkably consistent and relatively injury-free, and this allowed his performances to make up for some truly shocking defensive efforts. Lyon's failure to move for a recognised, experienced centre forward looks a crucial mistake at this juncture, and the hope is that the team do decide to rectify the current situation by spending some of the more than €100m in sales they've generated on a replacement. Getting the balance between league and European play right will fall on the shoulders of Génésio, who seems an affable presence with a good relationship with the players, but can also be guilty of being indecisive over his tactics and personnel. Part of his frustrations last season centered around several injuries, but those absences hardly excuse some of the bizarre decisions he's made. The backing of the board may give him additional confidence, but that confidence, if not backed by ability, will mean little.

### Verdict:

Lyon have sold important players before, but in losing their three best outfield players as well as the leadership of Gonalons and Jallet, Jean-Michel Aulas may have gone a step too far. Manager Génésio is adamant that Europe will be the team's focus this season, but that could well mean spending next season out of it, something that Lyon haven't experienced in almost two decades.

**Predicted Position: 6<sup>TH</sup>**



# MARSEILLE

## Marseille: Likely XI



## Marseille: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	5 <sup>th</sup>	62
2015/2016	Ligue 1	13 <sup>th</sup>	48
2014/2015	Ligue 1	4 <sup>th</sup>	69
2013/2014	Ligue 1	6 <sup>th</sup>	60
2012/2013	Ligue 1	2 <sup>nd</sup>	71

## Marseille: Key Man

### FLORIAN THAUVIN

Thauvin has been often held up as the prime example of the *enfant terrible* in France, having been massively successful at Bastia before subsequently moaning his way out of a move to Lille in favour of Marseille.

His time on the south coast was fairly undistinguished, and when he moved to Newcastle, it was seen as a major coup for Marseille, especially when he failed to impress for the Magpies. Loaned back to OM last season, he shook off his mantle of underachiever rather decisively, flourishing on the right side of a 4-3-3 and earning a call-up to the national team.

Dimitri Payet will still garner more of the spotlight owing to the circumstances of his departure from West Ham and the fee paid for him, but make no mistake, Thauvin being on form will make the difference between a successful and a mediocre season, especially with the defence looking set to be similarly rickety.

## Olympique de Marseille: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Yohann Pele	GK	French	34	2015/2016	FC Sochaux
Steve Mandanda	GK	French	32	2017/2018	Crystal Palace
Florian Escales	GK	French	21	2016/2017	-
Henri Bedimo	LB	Cameroonian	33	2016/2017	Olympique Lyonnais
Patrice Evra	LB	French	36	2016/2017	Juventus
Tomas Hubocan	CB/RB	Slovakian	31	2016/2017	Dynamo Moscow
Doria	CB/LB	Brazilian	22	2014/2015	Botafogo
Adil Rami	CB	French	31	2017/2018	Sevilla
Rod Fanni	CB/RB	French	35	2016/2017	Al-Arabi
Boubacar Kamara	CB	French	17	2017/2018	-
Gael Andonian	CB	French	22	2015/2016	-
Rolando	CB	Portuguese	31	2015/2016	FC Porto
Hiroki Sakai	RB	Japanese	26	2016/2017	Hannover 96
Luiz Gustavo	DM	Brazilian	30	2017/2018	Wolfsburg
Grégory Sertic	DM/CB	French	27	2016/2017	Bordeaux
Morgan Sanson	CM/DM	French	22	2016/2017	Montpellier
Andre Zambo Anguissa	DM	Cameroonian	21	2015/2016	Stade de Reims
Florian Thauvin	AM/RW	French	24	2016/2017	Newcastle United
Remy Cabella	AM/LW	French	27	2016/2017	Newcastle United
Maxime Lopez	AM	French	19	2014/2015	-
Lucas Ocampos	LW/ST	Argentinian	23	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Dimitri Payet	LW	French	30	2016/2017	West Ham United
Bouna Sarr	RW/RB	Guinean	25	2015/2016	FC Metz
Valere Germain	ST	French	27	2017/2018	AS Monaco
Clinton N'Jie	ST	Cameroonian	23	2016/2017	Tottenham Hotspur
Rudi Garcia	Manager	French	53	2016/2017	-
Jacques-Henri Eyraud	President	French	49	2016/2017	-



# MARSEILLE

## Olympique de Marseille: Squad Analysis

Marseille have been very active this summer, but new faces haven't been the order of the day, as two of those signings were making the loan signings of Thauvin and Clinton N'Jie permanent. The young Cameroonian failed to impress, but Thauvin was incredibly impressive in the run-in, even earning a call-up for France. With Rémy Cabella and Lucas Ocampos also on board, Marseille look well-stocked in the attacking department. Midfield has also been boosted with the arrival of Luis Gustavo, the Brazilian essentially a like-for-like replacement for William Vainqueur; the former Wolfsburg man will provide a fine fulcrum for the more attack-minded Morgan Sanson. Maxime Lopez, allowing good continuity for Rudi Garcia, while Steve Mandanda replaces Yohann Pelé in goal. The questions arise, however, in defense, where an already-old unit will have hardly been improved by the slow-footed Adil Rami. Despite being a starter for *Les Bleus* as recently as last summer, the former Lille defender isn't much of an upgrade on what was already on hand, and Marseille could struggle against teams with quicker forwards as a result.

### Strengths:

Midfield and attack, simply put. Marseille could struggle in defence, and the abilities of the front three, projected to be Payet, Germain and Thauvin, will be massively important if the team seek to balance that out while competing on multiple fronts. Payet was somewhat diffident after arriving from West Ham, but has been handed the captain's armband and will have to prove definitively that he can lead a team with European ambitions. In midfield, young Lopez is a bright, creative spark, while Sanson is an elegant and underrated box-to-box player, having ably made step up after a January move from Montpellier. Gustavo has been less than impressive in recent seasons, but Gregory Sertic and youngster André-Frank Zambo Anguissa offer capable alternatives if the Brazilian struggles to protect the team's defence.

### Weaknesses:

The age and pace of the defence is a really worry, particularly left back, where Henri Bedimo and Patrice Evra's aging legs will be relied upon extensively. Centrally, Rolando, Gregory Sertic, Rod Fanni and Adil Rami are all capable enough, but all are easily done for pace, as was shown in preseason matches, with balls over the top giving Marseille quite a few problems. Goalkeeper has the potential to be a weakness as well, as bizarre as that may seem with the return of club legend Steve Mandanda. France's back-up to Hugo Lloris, Mandanda looks like an upgrade on paper from Pelé, given his experience in both international matches and Europe but through injury, he rarely played in England and may need to knock off some rust before he is at his best. This combined with the sterling form of Pelé last season, means that Marseille could be even more vulnerable at the back. Depth at striker is also an issue, as neither N'Jie nor Cabella have the capacity to be effective leading the line in a 4-3-3. Of course, Garcia could change tactics should Germain be unavailable for an extended period of time, but he seemed loath to do that last season during an injury lay-off for Gomis, meaning that OM will have to manage Germain carefully.

### Verdict:

Marseille have their problems, yes, but they also have an excellent manager who knows the league and has succeeded before in Garcia. Their attack is likely to be the league's second or third best, depending on how Monaco adapt to their new signings, which will do much to offset the potentially shaky back line.

**Predicted Position: 5<sup>TH</sup>**



## FC Metz: Likely XI



## FC Metz: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	14th	43
2015/2016	Ligue 2	3rd	65
2014/2015	Ligue 1	19th	30
2013/2014	Ligue 2	1st	76
2012/2013	National	2nd	70

## FC Metz: Key Man

**RENAUD COHADE**

Young winger Ismaïla Sarr may have caught most of the headlines last season, with Cheick Diabaté also capturing some of the glory for his form after his January arrival, but Cohade may have been the team's most consistent performer.

Playing with an energy that belied his age, his box-to-box play meant that even without an orthodox playmaker or the creativity of the often-injured captain, Yann Jouffre, there was still rarely a lack of a spark in Metz's midfield.

Clever but rarely over-reaching on the ball, with a good eye for linking play as well as longer passes, Cohade led by example throughout a very tough season for *Les Grenats*, racking up the most tackles as well as the most assists.

Without Sarr and Diabaté, his task will have been no easier, but if the team can somehow continue their tenure in the top flight, it is a good bet that Cohade will have been at his best once more.



## FC Metz: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Thomas Didillon	GK	French	21	2013/2014	-
Eiji Kawashima	GK	Japanese	34	2016/2017	Dundee United
Quentin Beunardeau	GK	French	23	2017/2018	Tubize
Moussa Niakhaté	LB/CB	French	21	2017/2018	Valenciennes
Benoit Assou-Ekotto	LB	Cameroonian	33	2016/2017	AS Saint-Étienne
Matthieu Udol	LB/RB	French	21	2015/2016	-
Simon Falette	CB	French	25	2016/2017	Stade Brestois
Milan Bisevac	CB	Serbian	33	2016/2017	Lazio
Vahid Selimovic	CB	Luxembourgian	20	2016/2017	-
Oumar Gonzalez	CB	French	19	2015/2016	-
Ivan Balliu	RB	Spanish	25	2015/2016	Arouca
Jonathan Rivierez	RB	French	28	2014/2015	Havre AC
Cheick Doukouré	DM	Ivorian	24	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Geronimo Poblete	DM	Argentinian	25	2017/2018	Atletico Colon
Chris Philipps	DM	Luxembourgian	23	2015/2016	-
Lucas Toussaint	DM	French	21	2015/2016	-
Renaud Cohade	CM	French	32	2016/2017	AS Saint-Étienne
Florent Mollet	CM	French	25	2016/2017	US Creteil
Vincent Thill	AM	Luxembourgian	17	2016/2017	-
Kevin Lejeune	LW	French	32	2012/2013	FC Tours
Yann Jouffre	RW	French	32	2016/2017	FC Lorient
Opa Nguette	RW/ST	French	22	2016/2017	Valenciennes FC
Albie Jallow	RW	Gambian	18	2017/2018	Generation Foot
Nolan Roux	ST/LW	French	29	2017/2018	AS Saint-Étienne
Habib Diallo	ST	Senegalese	22	2015/2016	-
Ibrahima Niane	ST	Senegalese	18	2017/2018	Generation Foot
Thibaut Vion	ST	French	22	2014/2015	FC Porto
Gauthier Hein	ST/RW	French	20	2016/2017	-
Philippe Hinschberger	Manager	French	43	2015/2016	US Creteil
Bernard Serin	President	French	66	2009/2010	-





# FC METZ

## FC Metz: Squad Analysis

Against all odds, Metz scraped survival last season, with the inspirational wide play of Ismaïla Sarr and the finishing of Cheick Diabaté leading the way in front of a rickety defense. In the end, it was just enough, but the moves *Les Grenats* have made in the current window look to leave them worse off, with the club yet to reinvest any of the €17m that Sarr brought in. It is unlikely that will remain the case, but for the moment Metz look very wobbly, even with the promising addition of the young Valenciennes defender Moussa Niakhaté. Lacking a proven goalscorer or much in the way of defensive solidity (Metz had the league's worst defence last season), this will likely be another slog for Philippe Hinschberger's side, unless the Sarr money is wisely spent. Renaud Cohade and the right back, Ivan Balliu are capable presences, as is Yann Jouffre when fit, but the rest of the squad leaves something to be desired, either through a lack of quality or consistency. That said, a year of experience in Ligue 1 will have helped many of these players' developments, and with so many sides having major question marks, Metz could just about have enough to survive for a third season, although it is unlikely to be a walk in the park.

### Strengths:

It is hard to pinpoint much in this department for Metz; again, Cohade and Balliu were generally consistent, but beyond that, there were few positives among the players still with the team. Thomas Didillon would have seemed set for this category, but his poor 2016-17 campaign has considerably dimmed his star. The team are relatively solid in central midfield, where loanee Fallou Diagné should partner Cheick Doukouré after the departure of Georges Mandjeck, but what will likely be key for Metz this season is their experience. In Milan Bisevac, Cohade, Jouffre, Roux, Benoit Assou-Ekotto, Hinschberger can call on players with a hefty amount of top-flight experience, so long as none of them become frustrated with the team's situation. While this experience is not exactly a luxury, it is still nevertheless the kind of intangible that can tell over a long season, especially given that many players in the promoted sides have scarcely played professional football, let alone in Ligue 1.

### Weaknesses:

As unbelievable as it may sound, goalkeeping looks to be the team's biggest worry; Thomas Didillon was hugely impressive in past seasons, but seemed to regress, and badly at that, last season. He eventually lost his place to the veteran Japanese 'keeper, Eiji Kawashima, who impressed in the run-in, a set of circumstances that will hardly buoy the younger player's confidence. Reinstalled as the number one in pre-season, Didillon seems sharp again, but after a handful of disastrous displays last season, one has to wonder if his mental frailties could crop up again. Obviously, a lack of a proven goalscorer is also cause for concern, but central defense could be problematic, even as the veteran Milan Bisevac has been retained. A capable player at Lyon, he seemed to have aged badly during his time away from France, but Hinschberger has, perhaps rather riskily, opted to go with the Serbian and Simon Falette as his first choice.

### Verdict:

Little has been expressed about Metz here that is positive, but survival is still possible, especially with so many sides lacking top-flight experience. *Les Grenats* definitely have that in spades, and that could yet be the telling difference for the team's potential survival.

**P**REDICTED **P**OSITION: **17<sup>TH</sup>**



# MONTPELLIER

## Montpellier HSC: Likely XI



## Montpellier HSC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	15th	39
2015/2016	Ligue 1	12th	49
2014/2015	Ligue 1	7th	56
2013/2014	Ligue 1	15th	42
2012/2013	Ligue 1	9th	52

## Montpellier HSC: Key Man

# ELLYES SKHIRI

Skhiri was a revelation upon becoming a regular last season, and there is no question his performances will have to continue in that vein if Montpellier are to achieve safety.

Nominally a defensive midfielder, Skhiri ably demonstrated last season that despite his obvious attributes of size and strength, he also has a preternatural intelligence about the way he plays the game, and his versatility allowed the loss of Morgan Sanson, to Marseille to be less of the hammer blow that many had expected.

His interception totals last season were among the league's best, making him a key conduit in Montpellier's counter-attacking style, but his ability on the ball and range of passing is similarly impressive as well.

Having been handed the armband by new manager Michel der Zakarian, it is clear that further improvement is expected from the young Tunisian, but on the evidence of his career so far, he appears more than up to the task of leading *La Paillade*.





# MONTPELLIER

## Montpellier HSC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Laurent Pionnier	GK	French	35	2007/2008	-
Benjamin Lecomte	GK	French	26	2017/2018	FC Lorient
Jonathan Ligali	GK	French	26	2010/2011	-
Jerome Roussillon	LB	French	24	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Morgan Poaty	LB	French	20	2016/2017	-
Daniel Congre	LB/CB	French	32	2012/2013	Olimpo
Hilton	CB	Brazilian	39	2011/2012	Olympique de Marseille
Lukas Pokorny	CB	Czech	24	2016/2017	Slovan Liberec
William Remy	CB	French	26	2015/2016	Dijon FCO
Pedro Mendes	CB/RB	Portuguese	26	2017/2018	Rennes
Nordi Mukiele	RB	French	19	2017/2018	Stade Lavallois
Ruben Aguilar	RB	French	24	2017/2018	AJ Auxerre
Facundo Piriz*	DM	Uruguyan	27	2017/2018	Akhmat Grozny
Elleys Skhiri	DM	French	22	2015/2016	-
Paul Lasne	CM	French	28	2014/2015	AC Ajaccio
Stéphane Sessegnon	CM/AM	Beninese	33	2016/2017	West Bromwich Albion
Killian Sanson	CM	French	19	2016/2017	Evian TG FC
Ryad Boudebouz	AM	Algerian	26	2015/2016	SC Bastia
Keagan Dolly	LW	South African	24	2016/2017	Mamelodi Sundowns
Jonathan Ikoné*	LW/RW	French	19	2016/2017	Paris Saint-Germain
Souleymane Camara	RW/ST	Senegalese	34	2008/2009	OGC Nice
Isaac Mbenza	RW/LW	Belgian	21	2016/2017	Standard Liege
Kevin Berigaud	ST/AM	French	29	2014/2015	Evian TG FC
Giovanni Sio	ST	Ivorian	28	2017/2018	Stade Rennais
Casimir Ninga	ST	Belgian	24	2015/2016	Mangasport
Michel Der Zakarian	Manager	Armenian	54	2017/2018	Stade de Reims
Laurent Nicollin	President	French	44	2017/2018	-



# MONTPELLIER

## Montpellier HSC: Squad Analysis

The arrival of Michel der Zakarian, who underachieved with Reims and made Nantes one of the dullest sides in recent memory is never going to make fans of either Montpellier or indeed Ligue 1 as a whole very happy, but Montpellier have had a decent summer, despite the sale of Steve Mounié. While the striker's goals will certainly be missed, the money brought in has been turned into Benjamin Lecomte, Pedro Mendes and Giovanni Sio, players who aren't superstars, but have a good chance to be at least league-average players. Mendes in particular will make a very old central defence (Hilton and Daniel Congré) a bit younger, while Sio can be a threat on his day. Youngster Jonathan Ikoné, who was often a bright spark under Jean-Louis Gasset on loan from Paris Saint-Germain, will be tasked with a more direct role under der Zakarian, who has opted for a 4-4-2 with Ikoné and Isaac Mbenza on the wings in the team's pre-season matches.

### Strengths:

Montpellier's defence, unsurprisingly for a team under der Zakarian's stewardship, should be their best asset. Mendes is no slouch, he just wasn't better than either of Rennes' young centre backs, and in replacing the veteran Hilton alongside one of Congré or Lukas Pokorny, he should give Montpellier an accomplished presence in the heart of defence. The team's two attack-minded full-backs, January signing Nordi Mukiele and Jerome Roussillon, also look full of energy, and may do much to remind many of the way in which der Zakarian used Vincent Bessat and Issa Cissokho at Nantes, bombing up and down the flanks and pinging crosses into the box. Adding in depth from Hilton and summer signing Ruben Aguilar, and Montpellier look to have, on paper, one of the league's deeper defences. In addition to the back four, Shkiri's presence will be a net positive, and the loan of Facundo Piriz, who has a similar skill set, could give him an intriguing partner in midfield should Sessegnon depart.

### Weaknesses:

Piriz will need to hit the ground running if Sessegnon does depart; Montpellier's other options in midfield are somewhat uninspiring in Paul Lasne and young Killian Sanson. Given how important hard-working midfielders are to der Zakarian's approach, the team might do well to hang on to Sessegnon or make a play for an additional midfielder. Depth at centre forward is not a problem, but quality is; Casimir Ninga was impressive before an ACL injury, but given how reliant on his pace the Chad international is, how quickly he can be at his best is a matter of some debate. Giovanni Sio and Kévin Bérigaud have always underwhelmed, while Souleymane Camara's age and lack of pace make him ill-fitted for der Zakarian's style of play. The wide players are also a source of some concern; Mbenza and Ikoné are undoubtedly talented, but are very young, and could potentially also chafe under the rigor of their manager's demanding style.

### Verdict:

Montpellier, so fluid under Frédéric Hantz, and still a decent side going forward under his replacement, Jean-Louis Gasset in what was most often a 4-2-3-1, appear set to be mark two of der Zakarian's Nantes teams, who played a 4-4-2. That is to say, a negative, nasty side with the attacking impetus coming from the wide players, with the strikers likely working harder to press the opposing centre back than they do to put themselves in dangerous positions. Even if Montpellier are less pleasant to watch under der Zakarian, they should still have enough to stay up with the opportunism of Ninga and Sio up top; even if safety is only achieved by a small margin, the ebullient manager will have done his job.

**Predicted Position: 13<sup>TH</sup>**



# FC NANTES

## FC Nantes: Likely XI



## FC Nantes: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	7th	51
2015/2016	Ligue 1	14th	48
2014/2015	Ligue 1	14th	45
2013/2014	Ligue 1	13th	46
2012/2013	Ligue 2	3rd	69

## FC Nantes: Key Man

# EMILIANO SALA

The big Argentine, one of the first players to break through from Bordeaux's *Proyecto Crecer*, seemed destined for the scrap heap after a series of failed loan spells and a move to Nantes, a team who played dour football under Michel Der Zakarian.

Things took a dramatic turn last season, though, with Sala netting a dozen goals in the league and pushing hard for a European place. While *Les Canaris* eventually fell short of the top six, the partnership that Sala had established with Préjuce Nakoulma was one of the most vital in the league in the second half of the season.

The Burkina Faso international hit for six goals in eleven matches after returning from the Africa Cup of Nations and nine of Sala's goals were scored in the season's second half.

Half a season does not a player make, though, and if Nantes are to mount another challenge for Europe under Claudio Ranieri, Sala will have to be at his best once more.



# FC NANTES

## FC Nantes: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Ciprian Tataransu	GK	Romanian	31	2017/2018	Fiorentina
Maxime Dupé	GK	French	24	2011/2012	-
Quentin Braat	GK	French	20	2016/2017	-
Alexandre Olliero	GK	French	21	2016/2017	-
Lucas Lima	LB	Brazilian	25	2016/2017	Arouca
Wilifried Moimbe	LB	French	28	2015/2016	Stade Brestois
Diego Carlos	CB	Brazilian	24	2016/2017	Estoril
Nicolas Pallois	CB	French	29	2017/2018	Girondins de Bordeaux
Koffi Djidji	CB	French	24	2011/2012	-
Chidozie Awaziem*	CB	Nigerian	20	2017/2018	FC Porto
Anthony Walongwa	CB	DR Congolese	23	2014/2015	-
Léo Dubois	RB	French	22	2015/2016	-
Enock Kwateng	RB	French	20	2015/2016	-
Guillaume Gillet	DM	Belgian	33	2015/2016	RSC Anderlecht
Abdoulaye Toure	DM	French	23	2012/2013	-
Valentin Rongier	DM	French	22	2015/2016	-
Adrien Thomasson	CM/LW	French	23	2015/2016	Evian TG FC
Alexander Kacaniklic	LW	Swedish	25	2016/2017	Fulham FC
Alexis Alegré	LW	French	20	2015/2016	-
Jules Iloki	RW	French	25	2015/2016	-
Joris Kayembé	RW	Belgian	22	2017/2018	FC Porto
Kolbeinn Sigthorsson	ST	Icelandic	27	2015/2016	Ajax
Yacine Bammou	ST	French	25	2014/2015	-
Mariusz Stepinski	ST	Polish	22	2016/2017	Ruch Chorzow
Préjuce Nakoulma	ST/LW	Burkinabé	30	2016/2017	Kayserispor
Emiliano Sala	ST	Argentinian	25	2015/2016	Bordeaux
Claudio Ranieri	Manager	Italian	65	2017/2018	Leicester City
Waldemar Kita	President	Polish	64	2007/2008	FC Lausanne



# FC NANTES

## FC Nantes: Squad Analysis

Nantes have had an unremarkable summer, managerial appointment aside, with Amine Harit their only major departure. The youngster, who moved on to Schalke, brought in a decent fee, and the team's major arrivals, Nicolas Pallois, Ciprian Tatarusanu and Joris Kayembé look promising, although a knee injury looks set to keep Kayembé out until at least the new year. With Harit having been in Sergio Conceição's doghouse more often than not, this is essentially the same side that finished seventh, although Rémy Riou and Oswaldo Vizcarrondo have also departed. How they play under new manager Claudio Ranieri is another story, though; as the Italian, never one to bend to convention, has had the team lining up in a 3-5-2 as well as their familiar 4-4-2 in pre-season. It is clear he recognises the connection between Préjuce Nakoulma and Emiliano Sala, but he looks set to operate on more defensive principles, hence the arrival of Nicolas Pallois. There is good depth throughout the squad, but Ranieri will face a significant challenge if he wants the team to approach the season with a negative approach; much of Conceição's success was surely down to his appetite for attacking football.

### Strengths:

Depth through the centre of the park jumps out immediately in this category; Guillaume Gillet and Valentin Rongier quietly were one of Ligue 1's best midfield partnerships, and the Belgian appears set to stay despite overtures from Olympiakos. Abdoulaye Touré is a capable deputy as well, giving Nantes solidity without sacrificing attacking intent. The team's stable of centre forwards looks impressive as well; Nakoulma and Sala are the starters, but in Yacine Bammou, Mariusz Stepinski and the enigmatic Kolbeinn Sigthorsson, Ranieri has a raft of options should his confidence waver in either of his primary options. In defence, Nantes also look assured, with Leo Dubois and Lucas Lima competent going forward and Pallois joining the partnership of Koffi Djidji and Diego Carlos. In goal, Tatarusanu should start, but youngster Maxime Dupé is also highly thought-of, giving Nantes a very solid spine, and perhaps explaining why Ranieri might be tempted to go with a more defensive approach.

### Weaknesses:

Adrien Thomasson is a fine attacking midfielder/winger, capable of the sublime with the ball at his feet, but other than the former Evian man, *Les Canaris* are seriously lacking wide players. Kayembé, capable of playing both as an orthodox winger and as a wingback, was supposed to ameliorate that concern, but Ranieri will have to wait to use the youngster. In the meantime, the combination of Alexander Kacaniklic, Jules Iloki and Alexis Alégué will hardly strike fear into opponents; Nakoulma and Yacine Bammou were both deployed on the wing at times by Conceição and Ranieri may be forced to do the same. Depth at full-back is also somewhat worrying; behind Dubois, Enock Kwateng is an accomplished youth international for France, but has very little in the way of first-team experience, while Wilfried Moimbé, while more experienced, was a non-entity last season, despite looking a capable presence during his time with Brest and Tours in Ligue 2.

### Verdict:

Nantes were a wreck under René Girard and then a wrecking ball under Conceição. The Portuguese eventually left, and Ranieri was brought in, representing a huge gamble, but one that would certainly attract a large amount of attention, even after a rather disastrous finish to his tenure at Leicester. If he can gee up the players to the same extent as his predecessor, Nantes could again push for Europe, but given the team's reality, a lower mid-table finish is more likely.

**Predicted Position:** 14<sup>TH</sup>



# OGC NICE

## OGC Nice: Likely XI



## OGC Nice: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	78
2015/2016	Ligue 1	4 <sup>th</sup>	63
2014/2015	Ligue 1	11 <sup>th</sup>	48
2013/2014	Ligue 1	17 <sup>th</sup>	42
2012/2013	Ligue 1	4 <sup>th</sup>	64

## OGC Nice: Key Man

### MARIO BALOTELLI

Mario Balotelli's arrival to the south of France was the subject of much fanfare, and while he did have his best season in some time, there was still a general feeling that the big Italian had underachieved, his performances too often indifferent.

Nice didn't suffer as a result, with Alassane Pléa, Wylan Cyprien and Jean Michael Seri picking up much of the slack, but if *Les Aiglons* are going to continue their recent upward trajectory, Balotelli will have to perform, as he looks to be the attack's focal point in a 4-2-3-1. Pléa has returned from an ACL injury, playing wide on the left and Seri has remained with the club despite much speculation over a potential move, while Cyprien continues to recover from his own knee injury, a constellation of events that means Balotelli will have even fewer places to hide should his form stutter.

A full pre-season should ameliorate some of the fitness issues that plagued Balotelli last season, and with the Champions' League in the frame, the motivations are there, it is just a matter of the player recognising them.





# OGC NICE

## OGC Nice: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Yoan Cardinale	GK	French	23	2014/2015	-
Simon Pouplin	GK	French	32	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Mouez Hassen	GK	French	22	2012/2013	-
Walter Benitez	GK	Argentinian	24	2016/2017	Quilmes
Olivier Boscagli	LB	French	19	2015/2016	-
Dalbert	LB	Brazilian	23	2016/2017	Vitoria Guimaraes
Malang Sarr	CB	French	18	2016/2017	-
Maxime Le Marchand	CB	French	27	2015/2016	Le Havre
Dante	CB	Brazilian	33	2016/2017	Wolfsburg
Gautier Lloris	CB	French	22	2014/2015	-
Christophe Jallet	RB	French	33	2017/2018	Olympique Lyonnais
Arnaud Souquet	RB	French	24	2016/2017	Dijon FCO
Patrick Burner	RB	French	21	2016/2017	-
Remi Walter	DM	French	22	2015/2016	AS Nancy Lorraine
Jean Michael Seri	DM	Ivorian	26	2015/2016	Pacos de Ferreira
Adrien Tameze	CM/DM	French	23	2017/2018	Valenciennes
Albert Rafetraniaina	DM	Madagascan	20	2014/2015	-
Valentin Eysseric	CM/AM	French	25	2012/2013	AS Monaco
Vincent Koziello	CM	French	21	2014/2015	-
Jean-Victor Makengo	CM	French	19	2017/2018	SM Caen
Wylan Cyprien	CM	French	22	2016/2017	RC Lens
Arnaud Lusamba	AM	French	20	2016/2017	AS Nancy Lorraine
Pierre Lees-Melou	RW/AM	French	24	2017/2018	Dijon
Bassem Srarfi	RW/AM	Tunisian	20	2016/2017	Club Africain
Mario Balotelli	ST	Italian	26	2017/2018	Liverpool
Mickael Le Bihan	ST	French	26	2015/2016	Le Havre
Alassane Plea	ST	French	23	2014/2015	Olympique Lyonnais
Lucien Favre	Manager	French	59	2016/2017	Gladbach
Jean Pierre Rivere	President	French	59	2011/2012	-



# OGC NICE

## OGC Nice: Squad Analysis

Nice have had a bit of a tumultuous summer, as key loanees Ricardo Pereira and Younés Belhanda couldn't be retained permanently and captain Paul Baysse also departed. Rumours continue to persist around Jean-Michaël Seri, and to that end, much of Nice's strengthening has been in midfield, where Pierre Lees-Melou and Jean-Victor Makengo have arrived alongside Adrien Tameze. Christophe Jallet has also arrived on a free from Lyon, an intriguing move that will allow Nice depth at right back and also permit the team to play three at the back when needed, with Arnaud Souquet tucking inside. The underrated and versatile Valentin Eysseric has also been retained, and his creativity will be key as the team seeks to replace Younés Belhanda's flair. Expanded roles are also likely for Arnaud Lusamba and Bassem Srarfi, while Mickael Le Bihan could prove an important presence if Balotelli is suspended or is injured. Left back could be a problem if Dalbert Henrique is allowed to leave, but overall, Nice have a convincing amount of depth and the imagination of Lucien Favre, who stayed despite overtures from Borussia Dortmund, should keep things ticking over.

### Strengths:

Central midfield is an area of supreme quality and depth for Nice. In Seri, Rémi Walter, Vincent Koziello, Wylan Cyprien, Makengo, Tameze, Lusamba, Lees-Melou and Eysseric, the team have the personnel to populate two or three midfields, and in a variety of tactical systems. That cadre of players proved last season that they can produce goals, assists, ball retention, tackling and distribution in multiple configurations without losing much efficacy. Right back also looks to be a position of strength; Jallet is aging but was still a part of the French national team as recently as March, while Souquet was one of the league's revelations after he replaced the injured Ricardo Pereira mid-season. Central defence also looks ready to impress once more, even without Baysse, as the often-injured Maxime Le Marchand proved he looks ready for a starting role should Sarr be unable to recall his form of 2016.

### Weaknesses:

As previously described, Nice have a raft of exciting young players, with a good deal of experience mixed in as well, but there remain doubts over the ability of some of those players, particularly Cyprien and Pléa to recover their form after serious injury. Nice's hands were somewhat tied in this regard, as spending big on proven replacements could have led to player unrest. Nevertheless, there remains something of an air of expectancy around the club, as if mooted player sales (Seri and Dalbert in particular) could yet disrupt what looks a promising season, especially if the untested likes of Patrick Burner and Olivier Boscagli are called upon to become starters. The riposte to that would of course be the success that Malang Sarr exhibited last season, but one would also do well to remember how badly the young centre back fell away late in the campaign. Add in the strengthened Marseille and Nice's proactivity in the transfer window may end up going for naught if key players are unsettled by failure to progress in Europe.

### Verdict:

Nice have bought intelligently and early, no small matter given their season started in late July. To a squad full of intriguing young players, they have added more, giving needed depth, particularly in midfield. With Lyon, Monaco and Marseille undergoing similar reconstructions, the steady hand of Favre should be enough to see another top three finish.

**Predicted Position:** 3<sup>RD</sup>



## PSG: Likely XI



## PSG: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	2nd	87
2015/2016	Ligue 1	1st	96
2014/2015	Ligue 1	1st	83
2013/2014	Ligue 1	1st	89
2012/2013	Ligue 1	1st	83

## PSG: Key Man

**K**EVIN **T**RAPP

Trapp recently became the subject of much derision after a pair of horrible mistakes during Paris Saint-Germain's American tour, including being sent off against Tottenham, but without Trapp playing at a higher level, the team's ambitions will continue to be unfulfilled. The German is a superb reflex 'keeper, but his handling and positioning can border on the comical, even if his passing and ability with the ball at his feet can be impressive.

Sooner or later, his abilities or lack thereof will decide a match for the capital club, and the team could likely find themselves wishing they had been more aggressive in the transfer window, with the equally nerve-jangling Alphonse Areola Trapp's deputy.

Trapp had shown generally improved form after regaining his position in the first team from Areola in late winter, but his blunders in the US immediately brought back his weaker moments of last season, leaving some to question why Salvatore Sirigu and his reliability had been cast aside so quickly.



# PSG

## PSG: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Remy Descamps	GK	French	21	2017/2018	-
Kevin Trapp	GK	German	27	2015/2016	Eintracht Frankfurt
Alphonse Areola	GK	French	24	2013/2014	-
Yuri Berchiche	LB	Spanish	27	2017/2018	Real Sociedad
Layvin Kurzawa	LB	French	24	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Thiago Silva	CB	Brazilian	32	2012/2013	AC Milan
Marquinhos	CB	Brazilian	22	2013/2014	AS Roma
Presnel Kimpembe	CB	French	20	2014/2015	-
Thomas Meunier	RB	Belgian	24	2016/2017	Club Brugge
Dani Alves	RB	Brazilian	34	2017/2018	Juventus
Serge Aurier	RB/CB	Ivorian	24	2014/2015	Toulouse FC
Thiago Motta	DM	Italian	34	2011/2012	Inter Milan
Grzegorz Krychowiak	DM	Polish	27	2016/2017	Sevilla CF
Blaise Matuidi	CM	French	30	2011/2012	St Etienne
Christopher Nkunku	CM/AM	French	19	2015/2016	-
Marco Verratti	CM	Italian	24	2012/2013	Pescara
Adrien Rabiot	CM/DM	French	22	2012/2013	-
Julian Draxler	LW	German	23	2017/2018	Wolfsburg
Neymar	LW	Brazilian	25	2017/2018	FC Barcelona
Jese	LW	Spanish	24	2016/2017	Real Madrid CF
Javier Pastore	AM/LW	Argentinian	28	2011/2012	Palermo
Angel di Maria	LW/RW	Argentinian	29	2015/2016	Manchester United
Hatem Ben Arfa	AM	French	30	2016/2017	OGC Nice
Giovani Lo Celso	AM/ST	Argentinian	21	2016/17	Rosario
Lucas	LW/RW	Brazilian	24	2012/2013	Sao Paulo
Jean Christophe-Bahebeck	RW/ST	French	24	2011/2012	-
Edinson Cavani	ST	Uruguayan	30	2013/2014	Napoli
Unai Emery	Manager	Spanish	45	2016/2017	Sevilla CF
Nasser Al Khelaifi	President	Qatari	43	2010/2011	-



## PSG: Squad Analysis

Paris Saint-Germain had no real areas of need this summer, and consequently spent very little, the signing of super-star Neymar aside. The arrival of Berchiche sees a player brought in along the lines of Thomas Meunier, a capable pair of hands, allowing the team to rotate when necessary. Alves, meanwhile, will do much to replace the experience at the highest level and leadership that Maxwell contributed, and showed against Monaco, his race is far from run. Thiago Motta has re-signed for another year, and while perhaps another defensively-minded midfielder would have been ideal, the club seemingly intends to offer more playing time to Christopher Nkunku, which will allow Adrien Rabiot to operate in front of the back four more frequently.

### Strengths:

Despite their embarrassing loss to Barcelona in the Champions' League, this is still a fairly complete team. Marquinhos and Thiago Silva are a generally adept centre back partnership, and the first-choice fullbacks are impressive going forward, even if they are occasionally suspect in defence. The central midfield remains the team's real strength, though, allowing PSG to control possession with the energy and drive of Blaise Matuidi and Marco Verratti, with one of Thiago Motta or Adrien Rabiot protecting the back four. Youngster Christopher Nkunku was also impressive in a handful of appearances last season, and he should be able to build on that, even if Javier Pastore does feature more regularly. The wide areas are also well-stocked, with Lucas Moura and Di María adept on either flank and Julian Draxler impressing after his January arrival, not to mention the game-changing signing of Neymar. Up top, Edinson Cavani continued to flourish, scoring 49 goals in 50 matches across all competitions, even as there are concerns over his lacking a recognised deputy, even if the Brazilian world-record signing could play at centre-forward.

### Weaknesses:

The team's failure to add an experienced goalkeeper to put pressure on the callow and ineffective duo of Trapp and Areola seems to loom large, although the two could prove their doubters wrong. Given the numbers being paid for the likes of Ederson and Jordan Pickford this summer, perhaps PSG simply didn't see value in their part of the market, even if they were in need. Depth at striker is also worrying; Cavani has never had any long-term injuries, but he will be 31 this year, and given his tireless style of play, it is still worrying that the team lacks a clear second choice. A serious injury to Cavani will leave the goalscoring duties to a cadre of wide players who are effective enough in Ligue 1, but might not be enough in the Champions' League, where PSG will not be seeded after finishing second to Monaco.

### Verdict:

With Monaco, Nice and Lyon all selling many of their most important players, PSG would have become favourites to regain their lost title by doing nothing. Instead they signed a top 5, world class player in Neymar. Additionally, they did well to resist the petulance of a want-away Marco Verratti, and added a pair of veteran full-backs to boot. With more playing time given to the team's younger players (Kimpembe, Nkunku, Giovanni Lo Celso), fatigue should also cease to be an issue. Having Javier Pastore at full fitness will also be a boon to the team, as his creativity and versatility will allow Unai Emery to experiment more tactically, with the Argentine capable of playing wide, as a box-to-box midfielder, or as a number ten. All in all, nothing looks good enough to regain the throne in Ligue 1, but time will tell if the team's European ambitions look any more realistic – can Neymar have an instant impact?

**PREDICTED POSITION:** 1<sup>ST</sup>





# RENNES

## Stade Rennais: Likely XI



## Stade Rennais: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	9th	50
2015/2016	Ligue 1	8th	52
2014/2015	Ligue 1	9th	50
2013/2014	Ligue 1	12th	46
2012/2013	Ligue 1	13th	46

## Stade Rennais: Key Man

# BENOIT COSTIL

Gourcuff has struggled with his fitness for a seemingly interminable amount of time, but always seems to offer a potent reminder of his quality when he is on the pitch.

His creativity and vision as a potential hub for Rennes' clutch of exciting wide players could be a catalyst for a potential tilt at Europe, but in his absence, the team will have to take a very different approach, perhaps playing something closer to a 4-3-3. If the former Lyon and Bordeaux man can start something in the neighborhood of thirty matches, and contribute to a dozen or so goals, both of his own making and in providing assists, Rennes should be lovely to watch.

If his old problems recur, frustration could quickly become the order of the day at the Roazhon. Thus, Gourcuff offers a mighty gamble, but one which could pay massive dividends.

The hope here is that it's the latter, but in truth, we're more likely to see a mixed set of results over the course of the season.





# RENNES

## Stade Rennais: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Abdoulaye Diallo	GK	Senegalese	25	2009/2010	-
Raïs M'Bolhi	GK	Algerian	31	2016/2017	Antalyaspor
Edvinas Gertmonas	GK	Lithuanian	21	2014/2015	Atalntas Klaipede
Ludovic Baal	LB/LW	French	31	2015/2016	RC Lens
Afonso Figueiredo	LB	Portuguese	24	2016/2017	Boavista
Mexer	CB	Mozambican	28	2014/2015	CD Nacional
Ramy Bensebaini	CB/LB	Algerian	22	2016/2017	Paradou AC
Joris Gnagnon	CB	French	20	2016/2017	-
Séga Coulibaly	CB	French	21	2015/2016	-
Romain Danze	RB	French	31	2006/2007	-
Mehdi Zeffane	RB	Algerian	25	2015/2016	Olympique Lyonnais
Hamari Traoré	RB	Malian	25	2017/2018	Stade de Reims
Yacouba Sylla	DM	Malian	26	2015/2016	Aston Villa
Clement Chantome	DM	French	29	2016/2017	Bordeaux
Sanjin Prcic	CM	Bosnian	23	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Benjamin Bourigeaud	CM	French	23	2017/2018	RC Lens
Benjamin Andre	CM/RW	French	26	2014/2015	AC Ajaccio
Adrien Hunou	AM	French	23	2013/2014	-
Yoann Gourcuff	AM	French	31	2015/2016	Olympique Lyonnais
Anthony Ribelin	AM	French	21	2016/2017	Montpellier HSC
Sébastien Salles-Lamonge	AM	French	21	2016/2017	-
Faitout Maouassa	LW/RW/LB	French	19	2017/2018	AS Nancy Lorraine
Ismaïla Sarr	LW/RW	Senegalese	19	2017/2018	FC Metz
Morgan Amalfitano	RW	French	32	2016/2017	Lille OSC
Ndombé Mubelé	ST	DR Congolese	25	2016/2017	Al-Ahli
Brandon	ST	Spanish	22	2017/2018	Mallorca
Jordan Tell	ST	French	20	2017/2018	SM Caen
Christian Gourcuff	Manager	French	62	2016/2017	Algeria
Rene Ruello	President	French	68	2014/2015	-



# RENNES

## Stade Rennais: Squad Analysis

Rennes have finally loosened their proverbial purse strings, and in no small fashion, recording a net spend this summer that could be pushed north of €30m with certain bonuses. The team, now fashioned in Christian Gourcuff's image, is younger, quicker, and more attack-minded. It remains to be seen whether the veteran manager will continue with his favored 4-4-1-1 or adopt a different formation to wring more out of his young squad, but there is no question that this side, so dire in 2017, will now be among the league's more captivating. In Faitout Maouassa and Ismaila Sarr, Rennes have brought in two of the league's most impressive young players on the ball, and while they will require time to adapt to a more tactically nuanced system, their talent should make that transition relatively smooth. Elsewhere in the squad, the additions of Hamari Traoré from Reims and Benjamin Bourigeaud from Lens look canny as well; both players have a wealth of experience in Ligue 2, but are still fairly young at 25 and 23, while former Mallorca striker Brandon has arrived to provide competition for Ndombé Mubelé.

### Strengths:

Rennes' primary strength this season should lie in their back line; this may seem an odd positive for a Gourcuff side, but the young combination of Joris Gnagnon and Ramy Bensebaini should improve with age, and Hamari Traoré could be an upgrade on the veteran Romain Danzé. At left back, Ludovic Baal showed no signs of decline last season, and the back four should thrive as currently constructed. Rennes also look well-stocked in central midfield, where Benjamin André and Benjamin Bourigeaud will make the team a much more positive outfit than the likes of Clément Chantôme and Gelson Fernandes. Sanjin Prcic adds needed depth in this area as well, and Chantôme, despite his more prosaic style, could be key if negativity is desired against some of the league's bigger sides. Beyond the playing staff, the team should also approach the season with more positivity in general, having spent well on young attacking players, allowing the fans to be encouraged and making the Roazhon a difficult place to visit.

### Weaknesses:

That positivity is well-merited based on the team's transfer strategy, but serious questions still remain, especially if a top-six finish is the team's aim. In goal, Rais M'Bolhi is an experienced international for Algeria, but his itinerant career, largely away from Europe's best leagues, speaks to his perceived quality; the former Marseille reserve will need to take a big step up to make fans forget Benoit Costil, especially with the reserve options lacking experience. Depth in attacking midfield could also be a source of concern; as previously mentioned, Yoann Gourcuff can be sublime, but none of the team's other midfielders are well-suited to a creative role, despite their other attributes. If the former Lyon man does miss too many matches with injury, Rennes will struggle to some degree, either from a lack of continuity tactically or personnel-wise. Of course, Rennes could always set their stall out in a different formation from the off, but Gourcuff's dogged attachment to a 4-4-1-1, with a 4-3-3 similarly better suited to the squad may also prove a source of frustration, especially with little in the way of proven quality among the team's strikers.

### Verdict:

Rennes have spent well this summer, harvesting the best young talent from around France, and while they may have paid slightly over the odds for Sarr and Maouassa, there is no doubting their talents. A run at Europe will be tough given Lille and Marseille look similarly strengthened, but with the likes of Nice, Lyon and Bordeaux somewhat weaker on paper, there is every opportunity for Rennes to climb the table this season.

**P**REDICTED **P**OSITION: **11<sup>TH</sup>**



# ST. ETIENNE

## AS Saint Etienne: Likely XI



## AS Saint Etienne: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	8th	50
2015/2016	Ligue 1	6th	58
2014/2015	Ligue 1	5th	69
2013/2014	Ligue 1	4th	69
2012/2013	Ligue 1	5th	63

## AS Saint Etienne: Key Man

# Loic Perrin

The veteran centre back has quietly gone about his business with *Les Verts* for almost a decade, never getting a move to a bigger club or any significant attention from abroad, even though it has been more than merited. A cap for the national team has eluded him as well, but keen observers of Ligue 1 know that Perrin is one of the league's best, and best-kept secrets.

A deserved captain, his leadership will now become even more important with the departure of long-time manager Christophe Galtier. With Perrin the team's anchor in central defense, Galtier always aimed to construct sides that were hard to break down, using an opportunistic striker during Sainté's best seasons during his tenure.

Oscar Garcia comes with a reputation for being more attack-minded, but he would do well to recognize the quality at his disposal at the back, continuing to privilege Perrin, whose passing ability and composure will no doubt be essential if the team are to finish back among the European places this season.



# ST. ETIENNE

## AS Saint Etienne: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Stéphane Ruffier	GK	French	30	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Jessy Moulin	GK	French	31	2011/2012	-
Anthony Maisonnial	GK	French	19	2016/2017	-
Cheikh M'Bengue	LB	Senegalese	29	2016/2017	Stade Rennais
Florentin Pogba	CB/LB	French	26	2012/2013	CS Sedan
Leo Lacroix	CB	Swiss	25	2016/2017	FC Sion
Loic Perrin	CB	French	31	2003/2004	-
Saidy Janko	RB	Swiss	21	2017/2018	Celtic
Kevin Theophile-Catherine	RB/CB	French	27	2015/2016	Cardiff City
Ronaël Pierre-Gabriel	RB	French	19	2016/2017	-
Bryan Dabo	DM/CM	French	25	2016/2017	Montpellier HSC
Jeremy Clement	CM/DM	French	32	2011/2012	PSG
Ole Selnaes	CM	Norwegian	23	2015/2016	Rosenborg BK
Habib Maiga	CM	Ivorian	21	2016/2017	-
Vincent Pajot	CM	French	26	2015/2016	Stade Rennais
Kenny Rocha Santos	AM	Cape Verdean	17	2016/2017	-
Arnaud Nordin	LW	French	19	2016/2017	-
Romain Hamouma	RW	French	30	2012/2013	SM Caen
Ousmane Tannane	RW	Moroccan	23	2015/2016	Heracles
Jonathan Bamba	RW	French	21	2015/2016	-
Kevin Monnet-Paquet	RW/LW	French	28	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Lois Diony	ST	French	24	2016/2017	Dijon FCO
Robert Beric	ST	Slovenian	26	2015/2016	Rapid Vienna
Alexander Soderlund	ST	Norwegian	29	2015/2016	Rosenborg BK
Oscar Garcia	Manager	Spanish	44	2017/2018	RB Salzburg
Bernard Caiazzo	President	French	63	2009/2010	-
Roland Romeyer	President	French	71	2010/2011	-



# ST. ETIENNE

## AS Saint Etienne: Squad Analysis

Despite the arrival of Diony, traffic from the Stade Guichard has been decidedly one-way this summer, with Kévin Malcuit, Nolan Roux, Benjamin Corgnet and Fabien Lemoine all moving on. Besides the right back, none of that quartet were particularly influential last season, but the departure of their collective experience means that Saint-Étienne will offer a more youthful approach, a marked transition from what had often been a veteran side under Galtier. Malcuit's sale was made easier by the emergence of Ronael Pierre-Gabriel, but Habib Maiga, Arnaud Nordin and Jonathan Bamba should also play expanded roles this season, with Bamba in particular being held in high regard after a strong loan spell at Angers. A once misfiring and injury-prone attack will be the key area to watch. Romain Hamouma and Kévin Monnet-Paquet are capable wingers, but the team will need more creativity in central areas to get the best out of Diony and fellow forwards Robert Beric and Alexander Söderlund.

### Strengths:

Stéphane Ruffier is a fiery-tempered presence in goal, and while he can sometimes be rash, there were times in the 2016-17 season where he was being talked about as the best 'keeper in the league. He struggled somewhat in the run-in, but still remains one of Ligue 1's best two or three, and he is ably aided by Perrin, Pogba and Théophile-Catherine, a group of three centre backs that is also among the best, with Pogba and Théophile-Catherine also capable at full-back. Defensive midfield also looks a strong suit, with Vincent Pajot's energy and Ole Selnaes' range of passing important; Bryan Dabo disappointed last season and ended the season with the reserves, but if he can regain some of the form he showed at Montpellier, he adds needed depth. Centre forward, with the arrival of Diony looks well-stocked too, as Beric and Söderlund are capable presences, if somewhat injury-prone. The team's general depth is also worthy of praise, as a deputy of a decent standard exists for just about every player; Sainté are a well-constructed squad albeit one slightly thin on creativity.

### Weaknesses:

After their failed pursuit of both Patrick Vieira and Antoine Kombouaré, the hierarchy at St.Étienne opted for a foreign manager, once a rarity but now somewhat popular in Ligue 1. Taking the same route that Monaco, Paris Saint-Germain, Nice and Nantes have in recent seasons, the team looked abroad with the idea of installing a more attacking mindset. Similar to that set of managers, Oscar Garcia has a good deal of experience despite his age (44), but unlike them, his only success has come with teams that have had significant financial advantages over their rivals. He will also have to deal with a language barrier and settle on a tactical system, although a continuation of Galtier's 4-3-3 seems to be the immediate solution. Player-wise, the team lacks creativity in midfield. Youngster Jorginho has been loaned out, and Oussama Tannane hasn't shown much in the pre-season, all of which suggest a very tentative and potentially uncomfortable beginning to the Garcia era.

### Verdict:

With Perrin, Pogba and Ruffier, the heart of the defence is unlikely to be overcome by many opponents in the league; the issue will be forming a coherent attack. Diony is a promising presence and should alleviate pressure on the oft-injured Beric and Söderlund, but Garcia seems unsure as to his best eleven, and his experimentations will likely continue in the season's early stages. Not having to navigate European qualifiers may be a relief for the Spaniard, but it will also mean using valuable league matches to allow the squad to settle. Given the improvements made by the likes of Marseille and Lille, bettering last year's eighth-place finish will be a stretch.

**PREDICTED POSITION:** 9<sup>TH</sup>



# STRASBOURG

## RC Strasbourg: Likely XI



## RC Strasbourg: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 2	1st	67
2015/2016	National	1st	58
2014/2015	National	4 <sup>th</sup>	65
2013/2014	National	17 <sup>th</sup>	35
2012/2013	CFA	1 <sup>st</sup>	96*

## RC Strasbourg: Key Man

**DIMITRI LIENARD**

With eleven assists, Liénard ranked second last season in Ligue 2, an impressive figure that powered Strasbourg to the title and promotion. Many of these were admittedly from dead balls, but the veteran, signed from National 2 side Mulhouse in 2013 made all the difference in the run-in, helping his side win seven of their final ten matches (the other three were draws) to take first place.

A right-footed player, Liénard played a box-to-box role most often last year, and was generally charged with facilitating build-up play, using his range of passing and ability with the ball at his feet.

With Boutaib departed, Liénard and Benjamin Corgnet will be relied upon heavily to service new strikers Nuno da Costa and Idriss Saadi. The pair, with decent scoring records abroad and in Ligue 2, arrived for a relatively high fee for a club that had recently been playing amateur football, and if Liénard can't make the jump to the top flight, Strasbourg could struggle badly.





# STRASBOURG

## RC Strasbourg: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Alexandre Oukidja	GK	French	29	2014/2015	Lille OSC
Bingourou Kamara	GK	French	20	2017/2018	Tours
Landry Bonnefoi	GK	French	33	2016/2017	Chateauroux
Kenny Lala	RB	French	25	2017/2018	RC Lens
Ernest Seka	CB/RB	French	30	2014/2015	Amiens SC
Kader Mangane	CB	Senegalese	34	2016/2017	Gazelec Ajaccio
Yoann Salmier	CB	French	24	2014/2015	St-Brice-sous-Forêt
Steve Solvet	CB	French	21	2017/2018	-
Anthony Caci	CB/DM	French	20	2016/2017	-
Pablo Martinez	LB	French	28	2017/2018	Angers SCO
Abdallah Ndour	LB	Senegalese	23	2015/2016	FC Metz
Jean-Eudes Aholou	DM	Ivorian	23	2016/2017	US Orléans
Mayoro N'Doye	DM/LB	Senegalese	25	2015/2016	FC Metz
Jérémy Grimm	DM	French	30	2013/2014	Colmar
Jonas Martin	CM/DM	French	27	2017/2018	Real Betis
Vincent Nogueira	CM	French	29	2016/2017	Philadelphia Union
Anthony Goncalves	CM	French	31	2016/2017	Stade Lavallois
Dimitri Liénard	CM/LW	French	29	2013/2014	FC Mulhouse
Benjamin Corgnet	AM	French	30	2017/2018	AS Saint-Étienne
Ilhasan Sacko	AM	French	20	2016/2017	-
Idriss Saadi	ST	Algerian	25	2017/2018	Cardiff City
Stéphane Bahoken	ST	French	25	2014/2015	OGC Nice
Nuno Da Costa	ST	Cape Verdean	26	2017/2018	Valenciennes
Jérémy Blayac	ST	French	34	2015/2016	Angers SCO
Oumar Pouye	ST	Senegalese	29	2015/2016	Amiens SC
Thierry Laurey	Manager	French	53	2016/2017	Gazelec Ajaccio
Marc Keller	President	French	49	2012/2013	-



# STRASBOURG

## RC Strasbourg: Squad Analysis

Strasbourg have had an impressive summer so far, especially for a promoted side. Signing players with Ligue 1 experience eager to get their careers back on track is a canny way to add experience to a side that, while not young, is severely lacking in players who have spent much time in the top flight. In Benjamin Corgnet and Jonas Martin, but also in Pablo Martinez, Strasbourg have additions who are aged thirty or younger, but have impressed in the top flight at various times. Corgnet will be heavily relied upon to replace the creativity, if not the goals of Boutaib, while Martin will anchor a veteran midfield bereft of even much professional experience. The team have also added the former Lens fullback Kenny Lala, replacing the veteran Eric Marester, one of several older players to depart. The likes of Vincent Gragnic will hardly be missed, but the consensus seems to be that allowing Felipe Saad to remain in Ligue 2 with Lorient looks a mistake, as the former Caen man was easily the team's best defender. No replacements have arrived, with the team instead looking to academy graduates Steve Solvet and Anthony Caci to feature when needed, a move that while an encouraging nod to youth, does little to improve the amount of experience at Laurey's disposal.

### Strengths:

The most important additions to Laurey's side, though, may be the pair of strikers the club have brought in. Idriss Saadi is a fairly known quantity who should have ample motivation to prove himself in a league in which he failed in the past, while the purchase of da Costa has been seen as a coup after the Cape Verdean international impressed at Valenciennes last season. The two, both physical yet mobile, should form the focal point of a 4-3-1-2 similar to the one employed by Laurey in the previous season, allowing for some continuity. The pair will be buoyed by a considerable amount of creativity in midfield, with Corgnet and Liénard both capable of turning on match on its head on their day. While the team do lack experience in the top flight, the likes of Jérémy Grimm, Anthony Goncalves and particularly Vincent Nogueira (close to a hundred appearances for Sochaux) are seasoned players who can draw on hundreds of matches to adapt to Ligue 1.

### Weaknesses:

Of the six teams involved in Ligue 2's spectacular final day battle for promotion, Strasbourg had the worst defensive record, and the departure of Saad means that's unlikely to change. Presumptive starter Kader Mangane was a regular for Rennes nearly a decade ago, but at 34, his lack of pace has become a liability. The arrival of Lala means he is more likely to partner Mangane than be used on the flank, and he will need to find yet another method of adaptation to keep Strasbourg in the top flight. Seka's limited professional experience is a bit of a *leitmotif* throughout the side, and while teams like Angers have thoroughly refuted that the best players in Ligue 2 can't succeed in Ligue 1, those players have usually been defenders or midfielders; Strasbourg's lack of defensive solidity is a dissimilar situation and it would be no shock to see the team concede north of sixty goals a year after being hit for almost fifty in Ligue 2.

### Verdict:

Strasbourg have done well to bring in a handful of players with Ligue 1 experience, but with Boutaib gone, there will be massive pressure on the team's new arrivals to hit the ground running, anything beyond safety would be incredible.

**P**REDICTED **P**OSITION: **20<sup>TH</sup>**



# TOULOUSE

## Toulouse FC: Likely XI



## Toulouse FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 1	13th	44
2015/2016	Ligue 1	17th	40
2014/2015	Ligue 1	17th	42
2013/2014	Ligue 1	9th	49
2012/2013	Ligue 1	10th	51

## Toulouse FC: Key Man

# ANDY DELORT

Delort looked a striker reborn immediately upon his arrival from Mexican side Tigres, but his production soon dropped off, and steeply at that. Toulouse, seen as a dark horse for a European spot, tumbled down the table as the half-fit former Caen man struggled to regain the form that had seen him be so successful in Normandy. Under-used in Mexico, his sharpness and physical endurance seemed to elude him, as the hard-working centre forward seemed a shell of his former self. A summer off to recharge and improve his fitness should have Delort in better nick than the player of the season's final months, but if not, Toulouse, who have seen Martin Braithwaite off to Middlesbrough, could struggle dearly for goals, even with the likes of Ola Toivonen and Yaya Sanogo reasonable alternatives.

More than goals, though, Delort must discover his work-rate; the fear exists in some quarters that his wages and lack of playing time in Mexico may have led to complacency on his part, but at just 25, Delort should be in the prime of his career, and not drifting. Toulouse's dynamic defence and midfield is largely still in place; a hungry Delort can push this team up the table but a disaffected one could see them battling relegation.



# TOULOUSE

## Toulouse FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Marc Vidal	GK	French	26	2009/2010	-
Alban Lafont	GK	French	18	2015/2016	-
Mauro Goicoechea	GK	Uruguayan	29	2015/2016	FC Arouca
Issiaga Sylla	LB/LW	Malian	23	2012/2013	Horoya AC
Francois Moubandje	LB	Swiss	27	2013/2014	Servette
Steven Fortes	CB	Cape Verdean	25	2017/2018	Le Havre
Steeve Yago	CB/RB	Burkinabe	24	2012/2013	-
Issa Diop	CB	French	19	2015/2016	-
Christopher Jullien	CB	French	23	2016/2017	Freiburg
Kelvin Amian	RB	French	19	2016/2017	-
Clément Michelin	RB	French	20	2016/2017	-
Alexis Blin	DM	French	20	2015/2016	-
Jordan Sebban	DM	French	20	2017/2018	-
Yann Bodiger	DM	French	22	2015/2016	-
Somalia	DM	Brazilian	27	2015/2016	Ferencváros
Yannick Cahuzac	DM	French	32	2017/2018	SC Bastia
Zindine Machach	CM	French	23	2015/2016	-
Ibrahim Sangaré	CM	Ivorian	19	2016/2017	AS Denguélé
Jimmy Durmaz	LW	Swedish	28	2016/2017	Olympiakos
Quentin Boisgard	AM	French	20	2017/2018	-
Yaya Sanogo	ST	French	24	2017/2018	Arsenal
Ola Toivonen	ST	Swedish	31	2016/2017	Stade Rennais
Andy Delort	ST	French	25	2016/2017	Tigres
Corentin Jean	ST/RW	French	22	2016/2017	AS Monaco
Pascal Dupraz	Manager	French	54	2015/2016	Evian TG FC
Oliver Sedran	President	French	48	2001/2002	-



# TOULOUSE

## Toulouse FC: Squad Analysis

The losses of Oscar Tréjo and Martin Braithwaite shouldn't be downplayed, particularly in terms of their leadership, but in essence this is the same side that battled in the top half of the table for much of the season before seemingly putting their feet up in 2017, stuttering to a series of uninspiring draws to slip from European contention. Thus, Toulouse are both a side with great potential to succeed and great potential to fail, based seemingly solely on their motivation. Pascal Dupraz is no slouch in that department, but he can be naïve tactically and bizarrely attached to certain players, with Toivonen being a prime example. The team will once again be strong at the back and solid in midfield, but without Tréjo, they are direly lacking creativity. Corentin Jean and Jimmy Durmaz are likely to start on the wings, but are often more interested in their own opportunities than creating for others, while Issiaga Sylla is more of a willing worker than a creative tyro. There could be some hope from midfield, with Alexis Blin and Yann Bodiger both capable of picking a pass, but that partnership will have to be navigated delicately so as not to leave the defence exposed. The team's attack is an accomplished one, and very deep, but all its members have much to prove; despite Dupraz's impressive work in keeping the team safe two years ago, it may be this season that serves as a real referendum on his abilities.

### Strengths:

In Christophe Jullien and Issa Diop, Toulouse have one of the most physically imposing back lines in the league, providing fine cover for the young (still 18) goalkeeper Alban Lafont. The fullbacks, Steeve Yago and Francois Moubandjé, are also capable, although Kelvin Amian and Clément Michelin will both be eager to displace the Burkina Faso international, who may be used more at centre back this season with an eye toward accommodating the two youngsters. Central midfield is a point of strength as well, although Alexis Blin's development last season was often undermined by a persistent heel injury, but Zinedine Machach and Ibrahima Sangaré are another pair of highly touted youngsters looking for a chance. The strikers, Toivonen, Delort and Sanogo, have all had fine seasons in French football before, and present Dupraz with a wealth of options in style and approach, but must find a way to work together tactically in order for the team to succeed.

### Weaknesses:

Toulouse have an impressive set of strikers at their disposal, but in order for them to succeed, players within the squad will need put the team's interest at heart. The projected starters on the wings, Jimmy Durmaz and Corentin Jean, are talented, but neither have the ability to link play from midfield or play a through ball that Tréjo had. If one (or both) is willing to adapt their play to make Toulouse a bit more attractive going forward, the team could again challenge for Europe, but in the absence of any imagination, this could be a dire season. In that scenario, with the wide players chasing balls over the top in an ill-formed celebration of route one football. There is still time in the window as of this writing to secure a creative presence, but for the moment Toulouse appear set to effectively waste a season in the careers of a very impressive set of young players by having not built this squad effectively.

### Verdict:

Toulouse have done well this summer to fend off advances for the likes of Lafont, Jullien and Diop, a trio of younger players who can realistically be the foundation of a very strong Ligue 1 side. Relegation won't be an immediate concern, but truthfully that is more to do with the lack of quality in the teams below Toulouse than it is a mark of anything *Les Violet*s have accomplished this summer.

**P**REDICTED **P**OSITION: **15<sup>TH</sup>**



# TROYES AC

## ESTAC Troyes: Likely XI



## ESTAC Troyes: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points
2016/2017	Ligue 2	3rd	66
2015/2016	Ligue 1	20th	18
2014/2015	Ligue 2	1st	78
2013/2014	Ligue 2	10th	52
2012/2013	Ligue 1	19th	37

## ESTAC Troyes: Key Man

**A**DAMA **N**IANE

A product of Nantes' vaunted academy, Niane had never failed to score with Nantes's reserves, but he nevertheless saw his path to the first team blocked by a glut of strikers, and was forced to make a move away from Brittany, latching on with Troyes before the start of last season.

His 23 goals topped the league and saw Troyes promoted, playing a fairly open, attacking style of play under Jean-Louis Garcia. At 24, Niane has yet to feature in Ligue 1 barring a handful of cameos for Nantes, but has also impressed in various youth tournaments for Mali.

A powerful and athletic presence, Niane is good in the air, but can also finish with both feet. Though not especially quick, he has good acceleration and presents as a complete centre forward, albeit one who remains untested at this level. If Troyes, who have been relatively unambitious, in the summer are to have any hope of surviving, Niane's contributions will be vital.





# TROYES AC

## ESTAC Troyes: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Mamadou Samassa	GK	Malian	27	2016/2017	EA Guingamp
Erwin Zelazny	GK	French	25	2016/2017	Rodez
Johann Obiang	LB	Gabonese	24	2016/2017	Chateauroux
Charles Traoré	LB	Malian	25	2015/2016	FC Nantes
Mathieu Deplagne	RB	French	25	2017/2018	Montpellier HSC
Jérémy Cordoval	RB	French	27	2016/2017	Nimes
Jimmy Giraudon	CB	French	25	2016/2017	Grenoble Foot
Christophe Hérelle	CB	French	24	2016/2017	Creteil
Gabriel*	CB	Brazilian	19	2017/2018	Lille OSC
Oswaldo Vizcarrondo	CB	Venezuelan	33	2017/2018	FC Nantes
Mory Koné	CB	French	23	2014/2015	Parma
Francois Bellugou	DM/CB	French	30	2017/2018	FC Lorient
Alois Confais	DM	French	20	2015/2016	-
Karim Azamoum	DM	French	27	2013/2014	Hyères
Tristan Dingomé	DM	French	26	2016/2017	Mouscron
Samuel Grandsir	RW	French	20	2016/2017	-
Bryan Pelé	LW/RW	French	25	2017/2018	Stade Brestois
Stéphane Darbion	LW/RW	French	33	2012/2013	Skoda Xanthi
Saif-Eddine Khaoui*	AM	Tunisian	22	2017/2018	Olympique de Marseille
Chaouki Ben Saada	AM	Tunisian	33	2014/2015	Arles-Avignon
Benjamin Nivet	AM	French	40	2012/2013	SM Caen
Adama Niane	ST	Malian	24	2016/2017	FC Nantes
Jonathan Tinhan	ST/RW	Beninese	28	2016/2017	Amiens SC
Raphael Caceres	ST	French	29	2016/2017	Sochaux
Mour Paye	ST	French	23	2017/2018	Olympique Lyonnais
Jan Kaye	ST	French	21	2016/2017	Evian
Mamadou Sissako	ST	French	21	2016/2017	Le Havre
Jean-Louis Garcia	Manager	French	54	2016/2017	Grenoble Foot
Daniel Masoni	President	French	60	2009/2010	Racing Luxembourg



# TROYES AC

## ESTAC Troyes: Squad Analysis

Garcia, whose career includes spells at Lens and Angers, has always predicated his teams on being very solid defensively, but that was not quite the case last year, as Troyes' defence was fairly average. Wrestling with an aging squad, Garcia brought in a raft of younger players last season, including Christophe Hérelle, Johann Obiang and Jonathan Tinhon, a January arrival from Amiens. In concert with this group of players, Garcia also placed considerable faith in the likes of academy products like Grandsir and Alois Confais. While the results were sometimes sloppy, the energy of a renewed squad, coupled with the guile of Benjamin Nivet, gave Troyes the momentum that they needed for a surprising push for promotion. Garcia has spent the summer taking a fairly restrained approach, as Oswaldo Vizcarrondo, Francois Bellugou and Mathieu Deplagne have arrived along with Bryan Pelé. That trio looks certain to start, and while all have struggled at times in Ligue 1, they can immediately add experience to a group that has collectively spent little time in the French top flight.

### Strengths:

Depth, first and foremost, will be key for Troyes. It is not yet quite clear how this group of players' talents will translate to Ligue 1, so Garcia will need to have a range of options at his disposal. In acquiring the likes of Deplagne and Bellugou, he will be able to bring similarly experienced players like Karim Azamoum and Jeremy Cordoval off the bench. While this may seem to encourage a slap-dash approach, the team's attacking mentality should mean that they will have a bit of leeway when it comes to figuring out their best eleven, and how to manage Nivet's fitness. The team can also look to having more creativity than the average promoted side; among them, Nivet, Darbion and Pelé produced 25 assists last campaign in total. Add in the attacking inclinations of full-backs Obiang and Deplagne, and Troyes should be, at the very least, entertaining to watch, which will do much to continue to assuage the fears of a fan base who were somewhat cowed by the ignominy of the 2015-16 season.

### Weaknesses:

The elephant in the room in Troyes' recent success has always been their reliance on Nivet, who will be 41 before the season ends. He has not shown any dramatic signs of slipping to date, and has always been somewhat insulated positionally, playing a free role ahead of two orthodox defensive midfielders. The addition of Bellugou only serves to reinforce that, but if Nivet should suffer a drop in form or a serious injury, questions abound over how Garcia could adapt. The team have loaned Marseille youngster Saif-Eddine Khaoui for the season, and the Tunisian has played a fair amount professionally, having come through at Tours, but doesn't exactly inspire confidence. Vizcarrondo was unable to keep his place at Nantes, his pace fading with age, and could similarly be a liability, while Hérelle, while promising, is totally unproven at this level. Adama Niane, as well, will need to make a step up, and the worry remains that despite his obvious gifts, he could struggle in the top flight.

### Verdict:

As most other sides expected to scrap for relegation (fellow promoted sides Amiens and Strasbourg, Metz, Dijon) are similarly lacking in proven attacking talent, there may be enough for Troyes to avoid yet another immediate return to Ligue 2. Failing that, one would at least hope for an improvement on the embarrassment suffered by the club two seasons ago, when a team led by Jean-Marc Furlan struggled under the weight of both the league's worst attack and poorest defence.

**PREDICTED POSITION:** 16<sup>TH</sup>