

## 97. Lucas Mendes

Club: Olympique de Marseille

Date of Birth: 3rd July 1990

Position: Defender



Competition for places at Marseille has meant that recent game-time for Lucas Mendes has been limited. The defender appears to have generally lost out to Souleymane Diawara for the centre back spot alongside Nicolas N'Koulou. Nevertheless, Mendes has still appeared in almost half of Marseille's matches this season and in terms of the whole year, has been one of the club's most consistent performers. Despite a flurry of poorer showings in the Champions League in the last 4 months, the player has been a rock at the back in Ligue 1 over the last year and has even provided a few goals to help his team's cause recently.

One might think that due to Mendes' lack of appearances in Ligue 1 in these last six months, he is not an important player for Marseille. Elie Baup's strategy of saving Mendes up for key encounters, featuring against the likes of PSG, Monaco, St Etienne, Arsenal and Borussia Dortmund so far this season among others, has proven effective. Mendes has performed well in the majority of these encounters and even provided the opening goal in a 2-1 loss against Monaco with a belting header from a corner. Mendes also put in a man of the match performance fairly recently in a draw with Toulouse, where he looked unbeatable at the back; constantly halting opposition striker Eden Ben Basat's attempts to go past him. He capped off the game with a goal and this particular performance really highlighted the wonders of high level, constant game-time at a young age. Mendes, at only 23 years of age, has shown a consistency in match concentration and this allows him to track runs and not make any foolish mistakes. Out of the 3 centre backs available in the Marseille first team, Lucas Mendes has shown he is the least susceptible to lapses in concentration. However, current interim manager José Anigo has preferred Souleymane Diawara's experience over the arguably sharper Mendes. However, it has not all been perfect on the pitch this past year for Lucas Mendes. The first six months of the year were very comfortable for the Brazilian, as he put in a number of solid displays in order to propel Marseille to a second place finish and keep their excellent defensive record intact at the back end of last campaign.

Mendes has made a few poor performances of late, despite mainly good ones, and it does appear that there are many areas of his game that still need to be developed. A game against PSG in the early months of this season highlighted a few weaknesses and Mendes seemed incapable of defending against the likes of Cavani and Ibrahimovic. The player appears to struggle with stronger attackers and perhaps an alteration to the player's training schedule, dedicating more time to weights work would improve his ability to tussle with Ligue 1's most imposing strikers. The Brazilian also appears a little weak in the tackle; Mendes is often reluctant to dive into tackles and prefers to stay on his feet. While this could be seen as a positive, as he is less likely to give away free kicks in dangerous positions and penalties as often as other defenders this way, it leaves him susceptible to quick strikers who have the ability to run past him and leave him for dead. Mendes himself is not the quickest either and this does not help his cause. In the future, he needs to be more committed to challenge his opponent or simply drop deeper to stop players running past him.

Internationally speaking, the situation looks bleak for Lucas Mendes. At the age of 23, he is still young enough to force his way into the Brazil squad in the future, but one doubts whether that will ever be the case due to the abundance of defensive talent that the country holds. He is consistent and very mature for someone in their early twenties and his consistency will only improve. He was vital for Marseille at the start of the year and one must not forget that the player has only been in France for just over a year, arriving from Brazilian outfit Coritiba in the summer of 2012. In Mendes, Marseille have a centre back they will hope to be able to rely on for the long-term.

*'My French is improving, I speak better than Barton!'*

Lucas Mendes

14th March 2013

**STATS CENTRAL:** Lucas Mendes kept 10 Ligue 1 clean sheets in 25 appearances in 2013.