

## 24. Maxime Gonalons

Club: Olympique Lyonnais

Date of Birth: 10th March 1989

Position: Midfielder

It has to be said that 2013 has not been as big a success for Maxime Gonalons as his previous two years at Lyon were in 2011 and 2012. The Lyon team as a whole has had a poor 2013 with a slight break down at the end of last campaign, including beatings by Bastia amongst others, and a dreadful start to this season, with at least five losses before Christmas. Gonalons has nevertheless remained a strong presence in the middle of the park for Lyon, but is in the GFFN 100 mainly for his performances at the back end of last season than so far this year.

At the beginning of the calendar year, Gonalons was given the captain's armband by coach Remi Garde as a reward for his services the club thus far when it became clear in January that Lisandro Lopez was on his way out. However, it does appear that Gonalons has maybe focused more on this new level of responsibility than developing his own game and his performances have tended to suffer, most notably during the 2013/2014 campaign. As Gonalons himself has put it, 'Captaincy comes with great responsibility.' To be frank, there is little evidence to suggest that Gonalons has been a great captain with poor performances from his team on the pitch this season. Nevertheless, however, we are being very harsh. Gonalons' partnership with Grenier towards the back end of last season was brilliant to watch, whereas this season, the 24 year has been forced to sit a little deeper in order to protect a sometimes fragile defence.

When the player has moved to a more central midfield role, he has been able to control the tempo of the game better. We have still seen glimpses of brilliance from Gonalons this year despite the dip in form; the player has broken down countless attacks and despite a fairly poor defensive record, he is the main reason as to why Lyon have not conceded more goals. The midfielder is extremely good at picking the ball up and out of danger and then distributing it to start attacks, with his passing one of his major strong-suits. Gonalons' aerial presence is also notable as a skill that has been improved in recent times and this is maybe another reason why he is sitting deeper in order to cut off attacks this season.

The French international has put in some good performances this season and does appear to be improving every game, as have Lyon since September-time. A recent man of the match performance in a disappointing home draw to Valenciennes showed the true incline of his climb from the start of this season and he is looking to regain that form of 2012.



In the Europa League, it has been a different story, it appears. Gonalons was impressive in last season's competition at the start of 2013, putting in two inspiring performances at home and away in an aggregate loss to Tottenham Hotspur. The midfielder has tended to play slightly further forward in his few games in the competition this season and was rewarded with a goal recently against Portuguese side Vitoria de Guimaraes.

One main reason why Gonalons' standard of performance may have dropped is due to the constant speculation surrounding his future. The 24 year old has been constantly linked with Arsenal in the Premier League amongst others, but no concrete action has been taken. A firmer link, however, has been with Napoli, who made a number of unsuccessful bids for the player in the summer and do look set to return for him, possibly this winter. However, Gonalons himself has announced that he will not be going anywhere until the end of the season, saying: '*I will not be leaving this Winter.*', but a move to Napoli at the end of the season does seem possible, with the player admitting that he is in contact with the Italian side: 'Yes I am in contact with Napoli. Yes, it is interesting for next summer.' Thus perhaps Gonalons is being distracted. His slightly lower level of performance may have been caused by that slight lack of desire, although that does not appear to have put Benitez's team off, as the fact remains that despite being off form, Gonalons is still churning out performances level with some good players in Ligue 1 and the Napoli manager will know from glimpses this season that the player can do so much better on his day.

Gonalons has failed in his bid to represent the national team this year, last representing them at the end of 2012. This may be due to his drop in form or merely the good form of the likes of Paul Pogba and Blaise Matuidi, who are managing to keep other good French players out of the side, such as Yann M'Vila, to give an example.

Overall, we are probably being harsh on Gonalons in this GFFN 100 piece. He is playing in a team not performing and sometimes it is easy to single out the key players for blame. He is still one of Lyon's better players and indeed one of the best in Ligue 1 in that midfield role. He has shown glimpses of his brilliance this season, and despite not perhaps hitting the heights of 2012, he has the talent to establish himself firmly near the top of this year's GFFN 100.

*'It is going to be difficult for me to go to Brazil. I am consistent but there are only 23 places.'*

Maxime Gonalons

30th November 2013

**DID YOU KNOW?** Maxime Gonalons is of Iranian descent.