

89. Mickaël Tacalfred

Club: Stade de Reims

Date of Birth: 23rd April 1981

Position: Defender



Coming in at number 89 in this year's GFFN 100 is one of the Trojans of French football who has finally made it in the big time: Stade de Reims' centre back Mickaël Tacalfred. The 32 year old spent 2013 affirming himself as a regular at the heart of the Reims back four, and ensuring that his club go into the winter break an impressive 8th place in Ligue 1, just 2 points off the top 4.

Tacalfred is not your average central defender. Most centre backs are tall, and use their physical presence to dominate their opposing strikers. Tacalfred makes up for his shorter-than-average height of 5ft8 by being mobile and crafty. He is able to track the runs of the strikers with more ease than most and although he is at a disadvantage with his height, he has a decent leap, which means that he will be able to beat the majority of Ligue 1 strikers in the air. Tacalfred has been able to compensate for his lack of height and for this reason has been a success at the highest level for the last few years.

One of the reasons why the Reims' management have made Tacalfred such an integral part of the setup is his ability to perform well alongside numerous centre back partners. It should be noted that his partnership with Anthony Weber is especially impregnable. Weber deals with the aerial threat whilst Tacalfred tracks runs. Much like the Ligue 1 Koscielny-Mertesacker equivalent.

The answers lie in the statistics for Reims' successes in 2013. Last season, although Reims finished 14th in Ligue 1, they were a very impressive 7th in terms of defensive record. They were second last in terms of goals scored. This highlights the importance of the back line for Reims, without its strength, they could have been very close to relegation last year, judging by their offensive record. This season though, they have pushed on. With Tacalfred and co. maintaining their good defensive work, Reims have managed to up the scoring rate, and consequently they are, as previously mentioned, 2 points off the top 4, having lost just 4 games all season.

In terms of Tacalfred's own personal statistics, it is clear that he is one of the first names on the team sheet for his club. Of the 19 games this season, he has started 17 at centre back, missing 2 games only because of a tendon inflammation. Only fellow defender Weber and midfielder Oniangue have played more matches as an outfield player. Tacalfred has also helped Reims keep 7 clean sheets in the league this season, a figure only bettered by 4 other teams in Ligue 1.

It is difficult not to admire how far Tacalfred has come. Currently captain of a side now gunning for a top 10 finish in Ligue 1, the Guadeloupe international was only introduced to top flight football at the age of 31, in 2012. Perhaps this is why he seems to perform exceptionally well against the 'big' teams, because he still treasures each occasion to be able to do so.

He is an example of loyalty and determination to a cause which began with a Reims side that was relegated to the National (3rd division) in his first season with the team from the Champagne region of France. Manager Hubert Fournier's decision to award Tacalfred the captaincy in 2011 was an appropriate reward for the player's efforts as they began to claw their way back to where they belong- Ligue 1. All too often we see players jumping ship when a club wades through a difficult period, but not Tacalfred.

Tacalfred is 32 years old, suggesting that he is entering the final phase of his humbling footballing career. Certainly for now, all is well for the Guadeloupe international; Reims are performing above expectations (again) and he is playing almost every game for them. 2013 has been perhaps the most successful year in Tacalfred's career, and he is a worthy member of the GFFN 100.

'I hope that in the future we can go for European football. It demands work, but still.'
Mickaël Tacalfred

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