

98. Mustapha Yatabaré

Club: EA Guingamp

Date of Birth: 26th January 1986

Position: Attacker



The French born Malian striker has had a wonderful 2013, beginning in Ligue 2, where he was top scorer in the 2012/13 season, then continuing to play an important role Guingamp's Ligue 1 survival campaign from August onwards following the club's promotion to the top flight.

Yatabaré has a style of play that has allowed him to make the transition from Ligue 2 to Ligue 1 successfully, unlike many strikers who light up the second tier, only to lose their touch when it comes to the big boys.

Standing at 6ft, Yatabaré's height for a striker is not remarkable, but he is still able carry out the role of the 'goal poacher' effectively. This can be put down to his positioning inside the box; his energetic yet crafty style of placing himself in between defenders to make diagonal runs when a cross comes into the box. This was evidenced in October against Rennes when his sudden, surging run allowed him to take advantage of a bobbling ball in the opposition penalty area, resulting in a goal for his side.

Arguably, Yatabaré's greatest asset is in fact his ease of sudden acceleration. This enables him to effectively run off the last man. He has a tendency to cut the offside line very finely and while this can often lead to a 1 on 1 chance against the opposition goalkeeper, Yatabaré has a growing reputation of constantly being found by a teammate in an offside position; often to the frustration of the Guingamp faithful. As you can imagine, this style of play can be effective in Ligue 1 just as it was in France's second tier, and is the main reason why Yatabaré managed to bag 5 goals and 2 assists in his first 9 games of the 2013/2014 campaign.

The statistics also suggest that when Yatabaré played in Ligue 1 in 2013, Guingamp tended perform better, both offensively and overall. If we only counted the games in which Yatabaré has played, Guingamp would have been in an impressive 8th position. However, counting the games where Yatabaré had not featured only, Guingamp would be a lowly 13th, just 3 points above the relegation places.

Guingamp would have stood 7th looking purely at Ligue 1 goals scored with Yatabaré in the team, but a poor 16th without him. It is on this basis that the suggestion that EAG are currently holding the Malian back becomes apparent.

Led by their talismanic striker, Guingamp have had a brilliant 2013. To the surprise of many, they were promoted from Ligue 2 in the 2012/13 season finishing 2nd behind Monaco, with Yatabaré finishing top scorer. In spite of this achievement, almost everyone tipped Guingamp to go straight back down from where they came, to be destined for relegation back to Ligue 2 in the 2013/14 season. At the close of 2013, Guingamp were proving their doubters wrong. They finished the year in 12th in Ligue 1, a comfortable 10 points above the relegation zone, having never been beaten by more than 2 goals, even in games against the likes of PSG, Monaco and Lille (who they held to a 0-0 draw).

There are however reasons why Yatabaré has yet to hit the big time. Due to the nature of his game, a striker who thrives off of accurate balls behind the defence and quality crosses from out wide, if he fails to receive competent deliveries from teammates he will tend to vanish during the match and make little impact. If he is to reach the highest level, which I believe he can with the right guidance, he needs to learn to drop into midfield more to find an alternative way of having an influence on the game. 'If you want it come and get it' is a phrase that can be very much attributed to Yatabaré at this stage of his career.

Having said that, Mustapha Yatabaré has had a wonderful year. After leading Guingamp to promotion last season, his goals in Ligue 1 have ensured that they now are in a relatively comfortable mid-table position, and should avoid relegation if everything goes to plan. 2013 was without doubt Yatabaré's most successful year as a professional and the Malian has every chance of making 2014 equally as memorable.

'I feel good at Guingamp. It is a healthy club with an interesting project. Somewhere I can progress.'

Mustapha Yatabaré

13th June 2013

DID YOU KNOW? In October, Mustapha Yatabaré was fined €2000 and given a one month suspended jail sentence after being caught speeding at 200km/h in a Mini Cooper...