

84. Nemanja Pejčinović

Club: OGC Nice

Date of Birth: 4th November 1987

Position: Defender

You will not find many defenders in Europe, never mind just in Ligue 1, who have had a more successful 2013 than Nice's Nemanja Pejčinović.

In this calendar year, the Serbian has played 24 times in Ligue 1, scoring twice and helping his side keep 12 clean sheets in a historical 12 months for Les Aiglons, where they qualified for the Europa League and opened their new stadium, the Allianz Riviera.

In the 2012/13 season, Nice had been in reasonably good form coming back from the winter break and in their last 19 games of the season they only lost on six occasions finishing in fourth, only three points away from Champions League qualification. The team may have outperformed all expectations, but sadly did not have that extra bit of quality to knock Lyon off 3rd spot to qualify for Europe's top tier competition for the first time in their history.

Their second half to 2013 has been rocky, lacklustre and at times abysmal. Their failure to overcome Greek side Limassol over two legs to qualify for the Europa League somewhat set the tone for the 2013/2014 campaign thus far. They have yet to find their groove in the league, sitting mediocly 15th in a tightly-packed mid-table. A run of seven games without a point was halted with a much-needed win against Sochaux and the club will look to Pejčinović to ameliorate his performances and become a key figure again in their climbing back up the table.

Since his move from FK Rad Belgrade was made permanent in 2010, Pejčinović has become habituated with Ligue 1 but recently a change occurred which has affected him. Nice's poor performances are in no small part down to the departure of former captain Renato Civelli in the summer. 'Pej' as he is affectionately known by the Nice faithful must do his best to form a partnership with Mathieu Bodmer, who currently partners the Serb at the core of the defence. One of his weaknesses is his inability to adapt to situations on and off the pitch, at times this season he has looked lost without the authoritative Civelli at his side.



A fighter on the pitch, 2013 was the year in which Pejčinović agreed to discuss his struggles living amidst the extreme violence in Kosovo as a teenager. Strong in the air, with good pace and positional awareness, he has won 75% of duels this year alone, second behind Lille's Marko Basa, which is a real key attribute to a consistent, reliable centre-back.

This is also evident in how Nice have managed to keep a clean sheet in half of the games that Pejčinović has been involved in, he's an integral part to a squad that has no other adequate centre back cover to realistically replace him with. In the 13 games where he wasn't involved in 2013, they only won on four occasions and conceded 26 goals, exactly two a game. Again, the statistics tell the story.

With Pejčinović, the side are a little more confident in that they can hold their opposition to a limited amount of clear-cut chances and without him they can sometimes capitulate before having a chance to put up a fight back.

He's also a threat from set pieces but recently not in the way many would expect. Both his goals in 2013 have come from his feet rather than his head, with him almost having a striker's instinct to react to play and gamble on a chance close to goal. It's also a factor in how he defends, his reading of the game allows him to keep up with play and react to the situation that's presented by the opposition.

Pejčinović's 2013 was good on the pitch but his decision to represent a "Serbia B" side in a friendly in November earned him a fine from his club. OGC Nice could not afford to freeze such an integral part of the team out and he returned going straight back into the team.

Going into 2014, Nice will want to stop publications like the GFFN 100 from shouting Pejčinović's praises too loudly so as to not get clubs interested. The South of France club are in the process of offering 'Pej' a new contract, because if he does not sign he will leave for free in June. If they want to move back up the table and fight for another European spot, the Serbian will be an important cog to keep Les Aiglons ticking.

'When I came here I was nobody. Now, little by little, I have made something of myself.'

Nemanja Pejčinović

28th February 2013

Quotes of the Year: Mario Licka: "We are missing a lot of things. Defensively we are insufficient, offensively too."

Brest's central midfielder took a grim look on his team's ability to remain in Ligue 1 in March 2013.