

3. Radamel Falcao

2013 has been an exceptional year for the Colombian and is one that has seen him grow and perform even better for both club and country. Falcao started the year at Spanish side Atletico Madrid, but has since moved to French big spenders Monaco. Here he has continued to thrive, although it could be argued that he is playing against weaker defences than before.

At Atletico Madrid, Falcao was the star man and allowed the side to finish third in La Liga and thus qualify for the Champions League. Despite a slow start for Falcao due to injury, with the Colombian missing most of the opening month of 2013, the player put in a string of individually brilliant performances along the way for his team. For the vast majority of the time, Falcao played as an out and out striker, alongside or in front of Diego Costa and the Spanish side reaped the rewards due to his goals. Falcao reached his 200th career goal during this calendar year with his second of the game in a comfortable 5-0 victory against Granada. Falcao's last goal for the side came in a 2-1 loss to Barcelona.

The manner in which Falcao completed his career with Atletico is the moment, which he will most probably look back on as his fondest memory of 2013. The 27 year old turned provider in the Copa del Rey final against Real Madrid and appeared to play deeper than usual rather than in his orthodox target man position. Ultimately, Atletico triumphed over bitter rivals Real Madrid in a closely fought 2-1 win. Falcao will undoubtedly be delighted by the way that he was able to finish his career with the Spanish side and it was a fitting way to end for someone who had scored seventy goals in ninety-one appearances for the club. About winning the competition, Falcao had this to say:

"It's an unbelievable feeling. Now we have to enjoy it. This win feels awesome. We're happy with the effort we put in and that we can celebrate this win like the people wanted."

Falcao ended the 2012/2013 season with 28 goals, beaten in the scoring charts by only Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. Falcao epitomises the role of a goal-scoring poacher with ease and celebrate success, which makes him one of the most sought after forward men that world football currently has to offer. Despite not actually being markedly tall, the Colombian possesses an implausible leap and, uses a suitable run-up to muscle his way in front of the ball before the standing defenders can react appropriately. Evidently, the player poses a real aerial threat. Secondly, the player appears to be almost ambidextrous with his feet as he can hit the ball with remarkable power and accuracy with either his left or his right leg and thus is very difficult to defend against as defenders cannot show him onto one particular side as he will still be pose a significant threat.

Both of these qualities have been demonstrated during his time at Monaco, where Falcao has clocked up nine goals in fifteen starts in 2014. The player signed for a remarkable sum of around sixty million euros in July, despite being heavily linked with a move to the Premier League. At one point, *Marca* even claimed that Manchester United had an agreement in place for the player, although this soon proved not to be the case, and Chelsea as well as other clubs were said to be vying for the Colombian's signature. Nevertheless, Falcao came to France, but the validity of the purchase was soon brought into question as the player's old primary school in Colombia soon claimed to have birth records that stated that Falcao was lying about his age and he was actually 29 rather than 27, which would crucially decrease his value in terms of transfer. This has since been proved false by the player, but it was not the start that he desired at his new club.

On the pitch, however, Falcao started his Monaco career in fantastic fashion and despite a quiet opening game against Bordeaux, managed to tuck hope the ball after a few scrappy bounces to record his first goal on his competitive debut for the club in the last minute of the match. The player scored a penalty again a week later against Montpellier, where he had a better all round game and the link up play with notable team-mates James Rodriguez and João Moutinho began impressed, considering their time apart from each other. Falcao also formed a strong partnership with Emmanuel Rivière in this match and helped the Frenchman to get two goals of his own.

Despite still hammering in the goals for his new club, the majority of these have been where the player has been in the right place and the right time and have not required any genius finishes. Thus this shows that the Colombian's movement and reading of the game is of the highest quality, as his special awareness ensures that he places himself in the most advantageous positions in order to score. The quality of finishing has all changed for the better in recent weeks, with the player's last two goals. Firstly, the player produced an audacious clip over Anthony Lopes in a 2-1 win against Lyon and this was followed up by a wonderful effort into the far corner in a 1-1 draw with Evian.

Despite the positives, it has not been all plain sailing for Radamel Falcao since his arrival at Monaco. The player was on a four game goal drought before the chip against Lyon and has been out injured for most of December with a thigh injury. The player's return to action did not go to plan as he missed a penalty in a shocking 2-1 defeat to Valenciennes. This meant that the club lost ground on PSG in the title race. One fault which has come clear throughout Falcao's career, and one which has been displayed a few times this year, is that the player does take a while to return to form when coming back from injury.

Club: AS Monaco

Date of Birth: 10th February 1986

Position: Attacker



Overall, therefore, in the colours of both Atletico Madrid and AS Monaco it has been a very impressive year full of goals for the Colombian. Internationally, it has been a similar story. Falcao has been key, alongside teammate James Rodriguez, in allowing the side to qualify for the World Cup finals in Brazil this coming summer. Falcao converted two penalties in a 3-3 draw with Chile, despite being 3-0 down, in order to claim qualification, proving his ability to cope under pressure. The player has five goals in ten games for his national side this year and despite playing as an out and out striker, he has still provided important assists for his team. Colombia have been drawn in a group alongside Ivory Coast, Japan and Greece and Falcao, as well as his team-mates will be quietly confident that his side will progress past the group stage.

The big question is, when the finals come around, which club will Falcao be playing for? Ever since his arrival at Monaco, tabloids have suggested that the player is only in France for a short stay, but more reliable sources of late claim that José Mourinho sees Falcao as his main target for this coming year. A move this January does seem unlikely, but there does appear to be increasing evidence that the player will only spend one season at the French club before moving to one of Europe's elite.