

27. Steve Mandanda

Club: Olympique de Marseille

Date of Birth: 28th March 1985

Position: Goalkeeper



In 2013, Steve Mandanda's team, Olympique de Marseille, have had a turbulent time to say the least. However, the French goalkeeper has done everything he can to help the team stick together, playing every minute of every Ligue 1 game that Marseille have had in 2013. Many claim that, if it was not for the experienced Mandanda consistently playing in goal and controlling the Marseille defence, the fall from grace of his team would have been far more dramatic. Having said that, Mandanda has attracted some critics in the last calendar year, and his position as France's number 2 goalkeeper looks like it could be under threat. So, what is the real tale of Mandanda's 2013?

In the first half of the year, with the 2012/13 season was coming to a close, Mandanda was in inspired form. In the 19 Ligue 1 matches that he played, he conceded just 16 goals, which was the second least of any goalkeeper, beaten only by PSG's Salvatore Sirigu. In that time, he also kept 9 clean sheets, almost 1 every 2 games, of which 7 came in consecutive matches in a run that was only topped by Enyeama's heroics later in 2013. Overall, last year, Marseille's attack ranked as only the 14th best in Ligue 1, but Marseille ended up finishing in 2nd place in the league. Clearly, Marseille's defence, led by Mandanda, was a huge factor behind their admittedly surprising success last season.

This time around, in the latter half of 2013, both Mandanda and Marseille as a team have been far less effective. At the halfway stage of the season, Marseille are 6th in the Ligue 1 table, and Mandanda has kept just 5 clean sheets and conceded 20 goals. His form in this current season has drawn plenty of denigrators, who suggest that Mandanda's time at the peak of his game is coming to an end. However, Marseille's centre backs have been far less settled this season, mainly due to the injury and the adjudged decline in form of Lucas Mendes, so that may have more to do with Marseille's recent defensive slump rather than Mandanda's own failings.

So, what kind of a goalkeeper is Steve Mandanda? First and foremost, he is a great leader at the back. He commands his defensive players very well, which is a crucial skill for any goalkeeper, and was considered to have such great leadership skills that Elie Baup gave him the captaincy of the club. He is always vocal on the field, telling his defenders where to be.

In terms of his shot-stopping ability, he does not have the quickest reactions of any Ligue 1 goalkeepers, nor is he particularly quick off his line. However, his sense of positioning is right on point. When a shot comes towards goal Mandanda is very rarely flummoxed or caught out by what is flying towards him. His sense of anticipation, which has been refined and perfected as the seasons have gone by, means that goalkeeping howlers are rarely discussed when it comes to Marseille's number one. This therefore ensures Mandanda consistency to some extent, because, unlike some goalkeepers, he does not rely on making sharp reflex saves that may or may not come off. Positioning is something that does not necessarily ever go away, which has allowed Mandanda to have such a long and distinguished career.

Another very important part of Mandanda's game is the fact that he is explosive from a standing position. At his age, 29 years old, you would perhaps not expect Mandanda to have a particularly powerful standing dive, but by generating power from his legs he is able to spring off the ground and make some brilliant diving stops. This means that he is, at least to some extent, able to reduce the influence of his lack of height. Standing at 6ft 1, Mandanda is by no means exceedingly tall for a goalkeeper, but with a combination of his positioning skill and his jumping ability, he is able to be an extremely effective one nonetheless.

Lastly, although this is probably not the most important skill for a goalkeeper, Mandanda is quite good at saving penalties, and has shown this in 2013. He saved Mustapha Yatabaré's penalty in Marseille 3-1 win at Guingamp and, more recently, saved a Mesut Özil's spot kick against Arsenal in their Champions League group stage fixture.

To conclude, although Mandanda has perhaps not had an ideal end to 2013, he remains a very good goalkeeper that can do the job for France in the summer should Hugo Lloris becomes unavailable. His team, Olympique de Marseille, are struggling, but it would be better to get behind Mandanda, one of the only constants in the team, rather than to slate him. Whilst he has had a dip in form, he remains one of Ligue 1's top goalkeepers.

'I could not see myself leaving this club for PSG.'

Steve Mandanda

3rd October 2013

DID YOU KNOW? Steve Mandanda's brothers both play professional football. Parfait is also a goalkeeper, plying his trade in Belgium at Charleroi and Riffi also plays between the sticks at the youth setup at Caen.