

## 33. Vincent Enyeama

Club: LOSC Lille

Date of Birth: 29th August 1982

Position: Goalkeeper

To say that Vincent Enyeama's 2013 did not start as planned is an understatement. At 30 years of age, he had gone 7 consecutive games without playing for his club side Maccabi Tel Aviv, and many thought that his career was drawing to a close. However, deep inside, Enyeama knew that he still had it, that he could make it as a regular in one of Europe's top leagues. He just needed someone to give him that chance. Luckily for the Nigerian international, his parent club, Lille, were willing to give him a shot. What then happened in the second half of 2013 must have been beyond even Vincent Enyeama's wildest dreams.

Enyeama is a brilliantly unique goalkeeper. Rather than relying on a tremendous amount of positional awareness and know-how, like many of his contemporary Ligue 1 goalkeepers, Enyeama is amazingly athletic for a man of his age, and can pull off some saves that people would think were simply impossible. He has improbable reflexes, maybe the best of any Ligue 1 goalkeeper, coupled with his brilliant athleticism, which allows him to leap across goal with ease, and you have a shot-stopping machine. Enyeama's form in late 2013 has been so inspired, that he has been given various nicknames, varying from 'Eight-armed Enyeama,' which emphasises his shot-stopping ability, to 'The Cat,' which points to his cat-like reflexes.

Anyone who has watched Enyeama play will know that he is a nightmare for strikers to play against. Although he is not particularly tall for a goalkeeper, his agile movement across his line more than makes up for that, and his impressive leap means that he can command high balls into his box effectively. Enyeama also has a bit of a strange style, in that he often prefers to punch the ball clear rather than attempt to catch it if the ball is too awkward. Although this can occasionally put his side in precarious situations, the Nigerian considers it to be the safest option, and it has definitely paid off for him in 2013.

In addition, Enyeama also has one other crucial part to his game. Yes, he is very good at making reflex saves, but he is also able to do the basics well. He spreads himself wide in 1 on 1 situations, which has saved Lille on countless times this season. There have been so many brilliant pieces of goalkeeping from Enyeama even just half way through the current season, that it is hard to single particular saves out. However, his double save against Monaco and stunning back-post stop against Montpellier truly stand out.



Sometimes, statistics can be misleading, but the statistics that are associated with Enyeama's last 6 months at Lille are so impressive that they are well worth looking at. As the majority of readers will know, Enyeama helped Lille keep an unreal 11 consecutive Ligue 1 clean sheets, lasting 1,062 minutes without conceding, until defender Simon Kjaer fired past him into his own net, leaving Enyeama no chance of keeping it out. In doing so, he came extremely close to beating Huard's all time record of 1,176 consecutive minutes without conceding.

However, it is when we compare Enyeama's form to his contemporaries, rather than his predecessors, that we understand exactly how stunning the Nigerian has been in 2013, and in particular in the 2013/14 season. 19 games into the season, as European leagues headed into the winter breaks, Enyeama was ranked as the top European goalkeeper of the season so far. In terms of the ratio of shots saved to goals conceded, Enyeama's ratio of 7.0 was around twice as much as his European compatriots. Manuel Neuer, the top Bundesliga goalkeeper, had a ratio of 3.9, while veteran Italian Gianluigi Buffon's stood at a measly 2.3, almost 4 times worse than Enyeama. Whichever way you look at it, Enyeama's form in the first half of the 2013/14 season was nothing short of truly inspired.

So, what lies ahead for the veteran Nigerian? Well, for the first time in his career, he is playing regularly in one of Europe's top leagues, and drawing praise from all over the world. This summer, he will undoubtedly be Nigeria's number 1 choice goalkeeper for the World Cup, and with a relatively favourable group stage draw, Enyeama will be looking to propel the Super Eagles into the knockout stages. In a recent interview, Enyeama was quoted as saying 'I honestly think we (Nigeria) can reach or surpass the semi-final, because the attitude of the players in this team is splendid.' Who knows, with their talismanic Lillois goalkeeper, Nigeria may just have a shot...

*'I will work, work, work and then work some more. I will cut out these errors.'*

*Vincent Enyeama*

20th August 2013

**DID YOU KNOW?** In 2004, Vincent Enyeama was involved in a car accident which killed two motorcyclists, as well as the man driving the car that the Nigerian international was in at the time.