

## 57. Yohan Mollo

Club: AS Saint Étienne (loan)

Date of Birth: 18th July 1989

Position: Attacker

Still officially a Nancy player, 2013 has been all about Saint Étienne for Yohan Mollo. Having arrived at the start of the January transfer window, Mollo impressed during his first loan spell with *Les Verts*: as a result he was brought back to the club in September in an attempt to replicate this earlier impact in the current 2013/2014 season.

Capable of playing on both wings, the tricky youngster is lethal when cutting inside onto his favoured right foot, but also boasts crossing abilities strong enough to justify putting him out on the right. The speedy winger cuts an unerringly positive figure, always looking to cross, shoot from range and seek out that killer pass when appropriate. Furthermore, his increasing maturity and unselfish nature have seen him entrusted with set pieces at Saint Étienne, with 5 of his 11 assists during the 2012/13 season coming from corners or free kicks.

Yet this solidity to his game starkly contrasts his ever-present penchant for showmanship and a notable flair for the flamboyant. Regularly adorning his on-pitch performance with tricks and flicks, Mollo has lived up to his billing as the “Cristiano of France”, a nickname given to him at Monaco following his performances in the 2006/07 season that demonstrated a playing style similar to that of Madrid maestro Cristiano Ronaldo.

On a more sobering note, a tendency to commit silly fouls is something that Mollo will need to work on. In this season alone, despite only starting 6 times for Saint Étienne, he has already picked up two bookings and committed 12 fouls on the back of committing 45 last season.

Given his undoubtable talents, Nancy’s decision to allow one of the club’s most prominent attacking assets to leave for Saint Étienne was rightly questioned, especially given that the club were battling against relegation at the time. It is believed that Mollo’s prohibitively high wages were a key factor in his departure at that time.

Arriving with a burgeoning reputation to accompany his sizeable pay packet, the young player revealed no signs of nerves as he marked his Ligue 1 debut for *Les Verts* with a goal and an assist, instantly winning over the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard faithful and providing an indicator of what was to come. Over the course of his first few months at the club Mollo scored 4 goals and racked up 7 assists as he helped Saint Etienne seal an impressive fifth-place finish to accompany their Coupe de la Ligue triumph, which saw them end a three-decade long wait for a domestic trophy.



In a rare low for the youngster, however, Mollo suffered the heartbreak of a penalty miss in the semi-final shootout against Lille as he blazed his spot kick over. Fortunately the miss did not prove too costly to this victorious cup run as *Les Verts* went on to win the shootout 7-6 and the Cristiano of France bounced back to play the majority of the final and help his side to seal the historic win.

While his current campaign has yet to really ignite (being limited to hour-long cameos and substitute appearances at times) his form in the 2012/13 campaign ranked alongside the best in the league as the speedy winger led the Ligue 1 assist charts until late April.

While he ended up finishing in joint third place, behind Payet and Mathieu Valbuena and level on 11 with Gaël Danic, in an interview Mollo rightly pointed to the fact that Payet and Valbuena played significantly more than he did throughout the season (3,211 and 3,131 minutes respectively, compared to Mollo’s 2,229) which highlights his excellent set of statistics.

Although the gulf in class between the real Cristiano and the French Cristiano has widened considerably since 2007 – by no means a slight on Mollo, purely a nod of recognition to one of the greatest players in the game – if the young winger can close the gap even slightly in the coming years then we are in for a treat.

With the player due to return to Nancy when his loan expires at the end of June, his future path is yet to be decided. Crystal Palace were rumoured to be favourites to land his signature in the summer before he opted to re-join Saint Etienne and Mollo has often spoken of his interest in joining “the club of his dreams” Marseille. Interest in the winger is likely to soar in the coming months if he hits top form and, still to earn a full cap after previously representing France’s U-21s, a call-up for *Les Bleus* will undoubtedly be among his targets for the future.

A green flash of pace and trickery, there is plenty more to come from Mollo this season and, with time on his side at just 24, the gifted youngster has the potential to light up French football for years to come.

*‘What I want is to feel fulfilled and for everyone around me to feel the same.’*

Yohan Mollo

26th November 2013

**DID YOU KNOW?** Yohan Mollo is Marseille striker Andre Pierre Gignac’s cousin.