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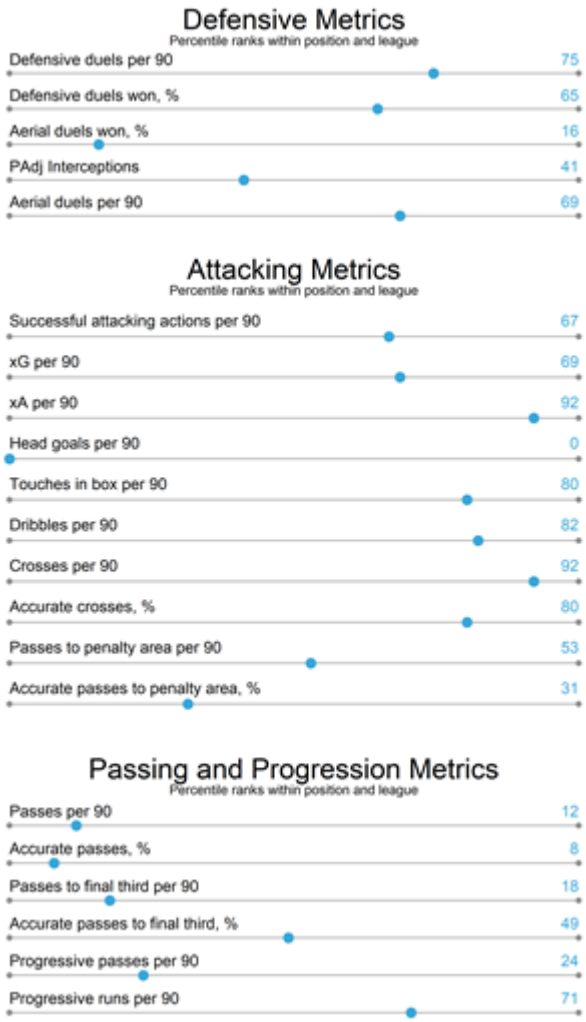
Marseille's Morgan Sanson is the latest rumoured Villa signing, with a number of respected outlets reporting the signing today, but what can the midfielder bring to Villa Park, and where would he fit into the side?



Sanson began his career with an excellent reputation and with a lot of expectation – earning10 caps for the French Under-21 side. A serious injury to his cruciate ligament, however, set the midfielder back somewhat. Since 2016, however, Sanson has stayed relatively injury free.

Season	Injury	from	until	Days	Games missed
20/21	Muscle Injury	Dec 13, 2020	Jan 12, 2021	30 days	5
20/21	Contracture	Sep 12, 2020	Sep 16, 2020	4 days	1
18/19	Calf Injury	Sep 27, 2018	Oct 17, 2018	20 days	3
17/18	Twisted knee	Jan 17, 2018	Jan 22, 2018	5 days	1
17/18	Ill	Jan 6, 2018	Jan 8, 2018	2 days	1
15/16	Knee Injury	Jan 11, 2016	Mar 7, 2016	56 days	10
14/15	Ruptured cruciate ligament	Apr 17, 2015	Nov 16, 2015	213 days	20
13/14	Groin Strain	Jan 31, 2014	Feb 7, 2014	7 days	1

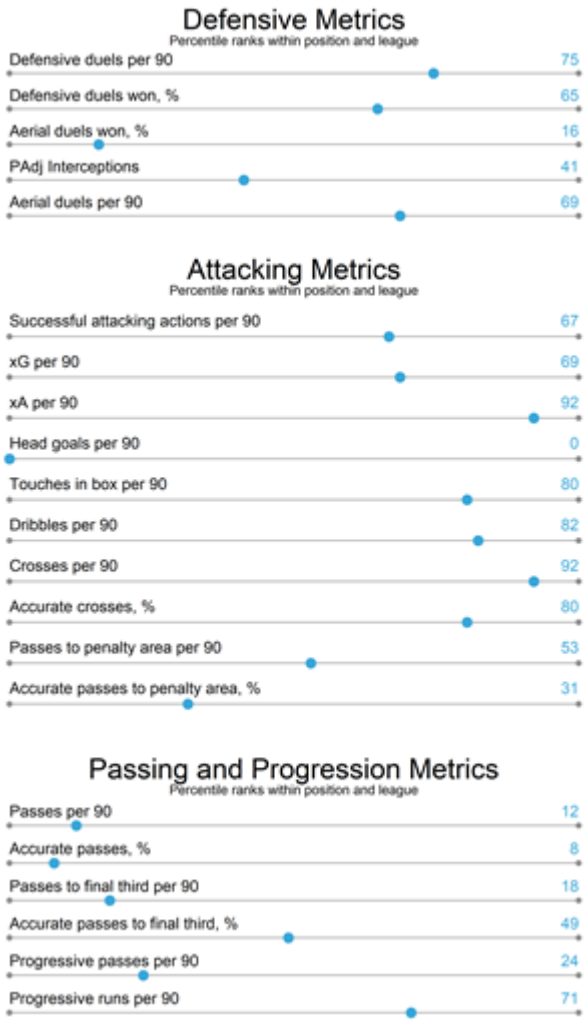
As a player, Sanson is a very active player. His statistical profile, compared to Ligue Un central midfielders this season, shows a healthy number of both defensive and attacking actions, a significant creative output, the will to enter the box, and a lot of ball carrying.



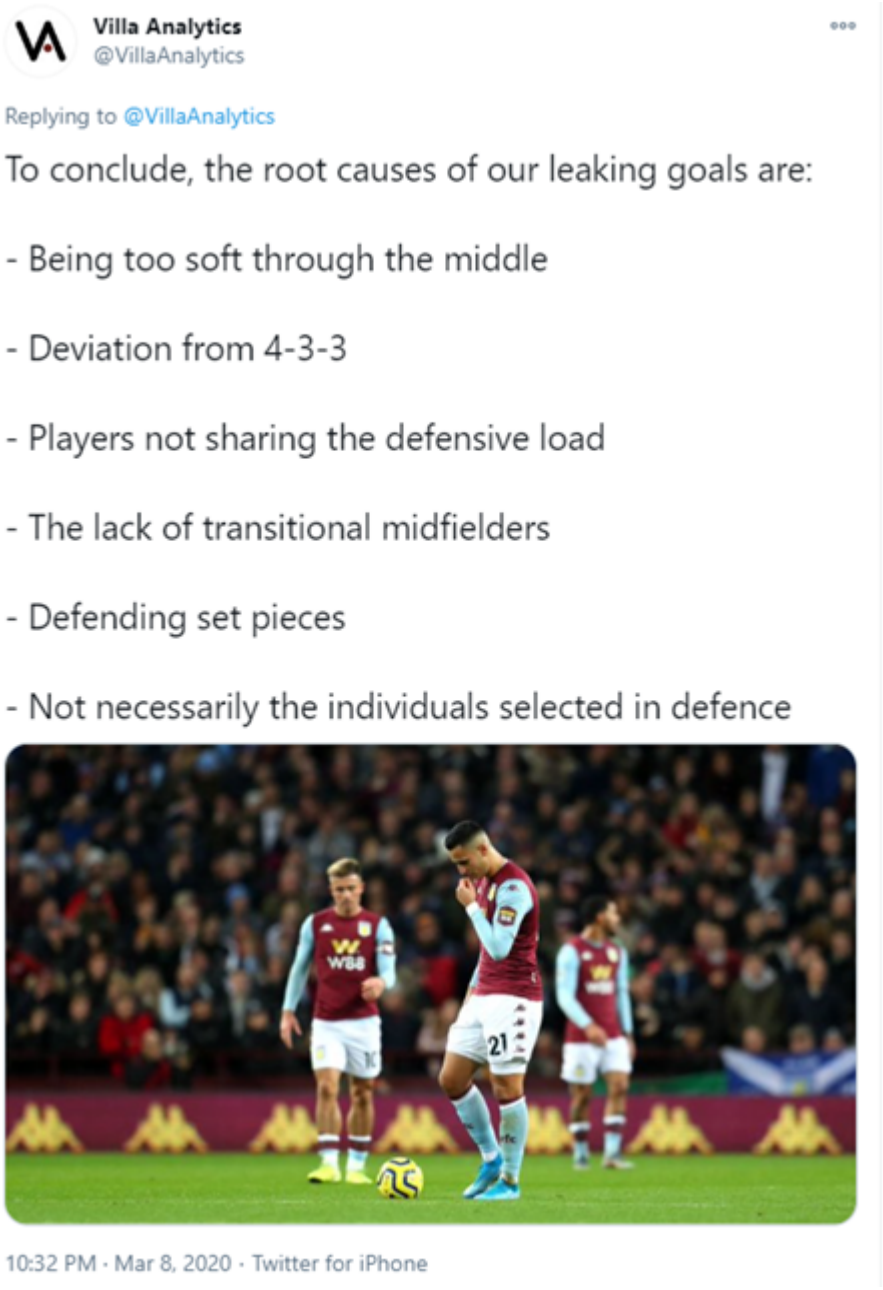
The big question around Sanson is that of who he would replace in our midfield. Whether it would be in preparation for Douglas Luiz to return to Man City, to compete for place with John McGinn, or to replace Ross Barkley if his deal did not become a permanent one?



Stylistically, John McGinn makes the most sense. Looking at Sanson’s profile again, this time with McGinn’s, the similarities are clear. Both players are ball-carrying, box-to-box midfielders whose passing isn’t a strength. Both can score, create, and love to enter the box.



Back in March, I suggested that if Villa stuck to our 4-3-3 formation and defended more in the midfield, we had the players required to build a far more solid base. Even before the addition of Cash in our post-lockdown matches we made a significant defensive improvement.



A sharp increase in Douglas Luiz's defensive output was of benefit, but the lack of defensive contribution from elsewhere in the midfield remains an factor. This would be something that selecting Sanson over McGinn would solve to even further our defensive strength.

To compare the two midfielder's defensive stats this season, Sanson has averaged 3.2 tackles to McGinn's 2.0 per game, 1.3 interceptions against 0.4, and 27 pressures per 90 to just 15 from McGinn – Sanson applying pressure in the defensive third almost three times more often.



If he were to sign, Sanson could replace McGinn in the team and offer the same dynamic ball-carrying skills and impact between both boxes that McGinn brings to the side while adding further defensive support to Luiz and the back 4. He may, however, play alongside the Scot.

An alternative is that Sanson has been brought in to replace Ross Barkley. Being an older member of the side, a loanee, and missing a number of games already this season through injury, the club may feel that signing Morgan Sanson would be better than making Ross' deal permanent.



Sanson in for Barkley would make our system very much a 4-3-3 and would take away somewhat from our press in attack, removing the free shift from the 4-2-3-1 into what is effectively a 4-4-2 as we have seen on a numerous – particularly with Barkley in the side.

This change would, however, make Villa incredibly hard to break down while keeping a ball-carrier in the side for our transition play. The option of Sanson replacing either Barkley or McGinn would be a very real one. Essentially, Sanson would give us comepetiton in the midfield.



For that reason, I feel the signing of Sanson would be a smart one. Should Barkley pick up another injury or leave, or if McGinn picked up another injury Sanson would be a solid replacement for either player and would push both to perform at an even higher level.