



Guingamp Football

En Avant de Guingamp – the town’s football team, playing its home games on Friday evenings at the Stade du Roudourou. French professional football has just two divisions, with twenty teams in each, and Guingamp play in the lower of them, Ligue Deux. The other Breton clubs, Brest, Lorient and Rennes, all play in Ligue Un. So Guingamp are hardly the local top dog. But considering the town’s diminutive population, which is even smaller than that of, say, the village of Knowle, in Warwickshire, it clearly punches well above its weight. As if to reflect this, its stadium holds over 18,000 spectators – that’s well over twice the town’s entire number. It’s therefore a team that clearly deserves its passionate support. If you live in central Brittany, it’s probably your local ‘big team’. And if you’re a Londoner as well, look out for the Guingamp supporters’ club, based in the capital.

This year is a hugely important one for the club: 2012 is its centenary. Currently 13th in Ligue Deux, however, things are a little, how shall we say...? But never mind. The greatest year yet in its proud 100 year history was as recent as 2009, when it actually won La Coupe de France, becoming only the second team ever to win this competition from outside the first division. They beat Rennes in the final, 2-1. And, as you might expect, as fellow Bretons, they have nothing but sympathy for their vanquished rivals.

Incredibly, past players include international galacticos like the Ivorian Didier Drogba, Frenchman Florent Malouda, and the Brazilians Eduardo and Felipe. So this isn’t just a football club. It’s also a training ground and a scouting ground for the elite clubs of Europe – big-spending clubs like Chelsea, where Drogba and Malouda are now based. But who in the current team is a future star? Anthony Knockaert? Or Thibault Giresse? Or, perhaps, Julie Morel? Well, shame on you, Guingamp fans, for not knowing that your women’s team have a midfielder who currently leads the ratings for the best player in the French women’s league – and incidentally, Guingamp Women play in their Division One!

Anyway, try to remember this name: En Avant de Guingamp – a big club with a massive history for such a small town. Just one last word of encouragement. So let’s hear it for the lads and lasses in red and black: (SF: Crowd cheer)