



INSIDE FRANCULINO’S PRE-SEASON: 11 DAYS AT CLUB LA SANTA AND INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

Franculino opened his account for the new season on Sunday, while his physical metrics are also closing in on their peak. The 22-year-old striker's return to top form has been anything but accidental. A key part of the process was an individual training camp completed while the rest of the squad enjoyed their summer break.

04/08/26 Christian Rothausen Foto: Daniel Stentz



Valdemar Byskov threads a pass into Franculino just outside the penalty area. His first touch cushions the ball into the air before he unleashes a fierce left-footed volley. Seconds later, the net bulges behind Matej Delač.

“Franculino is back.”

That was the verdict in the hours after the Guinea-Bissau international found the net for the first time this season.

The second half of last season didn't unfold the way the 22-year-old striker had hoped. Despite a lengthy spell on the sidelines through injury, he still finished as the 3F Superliga's top scorer with 17 goals in just 21 league appearances, ending the campaign with 22 goals in 34 matches across all competitions.

Not long after FC Midtjylland lifted the Danish Cup on 14 May, the players headed off for their summer break. But while most of the squad switched off, work was already underway to prepare one of Danish football's deadliest finishers for another prolific season in black and red.

– Heading into the cup final, Francu was in a really good place, even though he didn't make the matchday squad. We wanted to build on that progress throughout the summer, says FC Midtjylland Head of Medical Michael Brown.

AN EXTRA PRE-SEASON WHILE THE SQUAD WERE AWAY

Eleven days before Mike Tullberg's squad returned for pre-season, Franculino and teammate Alamara Djabi arrived at Club La Santa – the world-renowned sports resort on the Spanish island of Lanzarote.

Waiting for them were Michael Brown and Laura Brown, both part of FC Midtjylland's physical performance department, with a carefully planned individual training programme.

– Francu is the type of player who always does what's asked of him, so we never questioned his commitment. But we wanted to have more control over the process, which is why we organised this training camp for him and Alamara at La Santa.

– Laura focused on movement quality and mobility, while I worked with him on his fitness and football-specific work out on the pitch. Our goal was to have him arrive for pre-season at the same level as the rest of the squad – or maybe even slightly ahead.



Franculino and Alamara Djabi pictured with Michael Brown and his two children, who also joined the trip to Lanzarote.

A TYPICAL DAY AT CLUB LA SANTA

The schedule barely changed throughout the 11-day camp.

- 8.30 – Breakfast
- 10.00 – Treatment
- 10.30 – Reha/mobility
- 11.00 – High intensity pitch work
- 12.30 – Strength
- 13.30 – Lunch
- 15.00 – Treatment
- 16.00 – Technical work with ball
- 17.30 – Recovery; pool, ice bath, stretching

– Our nutritionist Jacob Nortvig had prepared a detailed nutrition plan covering every meal and snack throughout the day. We stayed in close contact with him to ensure Francu's intake matched exactly what his body needed, says Michael Brown and continues:

– I think we completed around 20 sessions out on the pitch during those 11 days, so we really pushed him hard.

– As a club, we made it a priority to give Francu everything he needed during those 11 days. We were able to work with him extremely closely, and it was the perfect opportunity to do it.

– Francu always says he doesn't like going to the gym, but I think it's more that he doesn't like the idea of it. Once he's in there, he gives absolutely everything. I honestly couldn't have asked anyone to work harder than he did during those 11 days. He'll moan about it, but once the session starts, he's the ultimate professional.

CREATING MEMORIES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

The 11 days at Club La Santa weren't just about putting in the hard yards on the training pitch and in the gym. They also became an unforgettable experience for a group of children holidaying on Lanzarote with their families.

– La Santa is almost like a little piece of Denmark during the summer, so when Franculino is walking around in FC Midtjylland gear, people notice him. On the very first day, two boys spotted him and asked, 'Is that Franculino?'

Brown smiles as he recalls how a simple encounter quickly turned into something much bigger.

– Francu and Alamara are both brilliant with kids. They had a kickabout with them, and the next day those same two boys came back with a couple of friends. We asked them if they fancied a game – Francu and Alamara against the four boys.

The following day, even more children showed up. By the end of the training camp, around a dozen youngsters had made it part of their daily routine to finish the afternoon playing football with the two FC Midtjylland players.

– Those first two boys came every single day. They watched our warm-up, copied the exercises and tried to do everything we did. Whenever Francu was working on his finishing, we suddenly had two ball boys sprinting after every shot that flew wide.



Franculino with the two boys who became a familiar part of the 22-year-old striker's daily training routine.

For Brown, it became about much more than football.

– I'm convinced it gave Francu an extra lift as well. Having those boys there every day, genuinely appreciating the work he was putting in to get himself ready for the season, definitely meant something.

One story, in particular, has stayed with him.

– One of the boys celebrated his birthday while we were there. His dad told us that, even before they travelled to Lanzarote, his biggest wish was to get a Franculino shirt.

– On his birthday, he spent time playing two-touch with Francu, but Francu hadn't brought any match shirts with him. Instead, he gave the boy his Instagram and promised they'd sort something out.

A few weeks later, that promise was fulfilled.

The boy travelled to MCH Arena for FC Midtjylland's recent home game against AC Horsens, where he finally met his hero again – and this time, he went home with the shirt he'd been dreaming about.

– I just thought that was a beautiful moment, says Brown.

– I'm sure Francu has won over a few young FC Midtjylland supporters through experiences like that. Some of those boys probably weren't Midtjylland fans before they met him.

– HE'S TAKEN ANOTHER STEP

Fast forward to today, and Michael Brown believes the work put in during those 11 days has played a significant part in Franculino's impressive start to the season.

First came two efforts off the woodwork against Beşiktaş. Then came Sunday's superb finish in the 3F Superliga.

For Brown, those performances are no coincidence.

– Our style of play is physically demanding, and it starts with the forwards. He hasn't played a full 90 minutes yet, but that has been a decision made by the coaching staff. When you look at expected sprint distance and high-intensity running per 90 minutes, he's actually among the top four in the squad.

FC Midtjylland's performance staff use an internal model that estimates what a player's physical output would look like over 90 minutes, allowing them to compare players regardless of playing time.

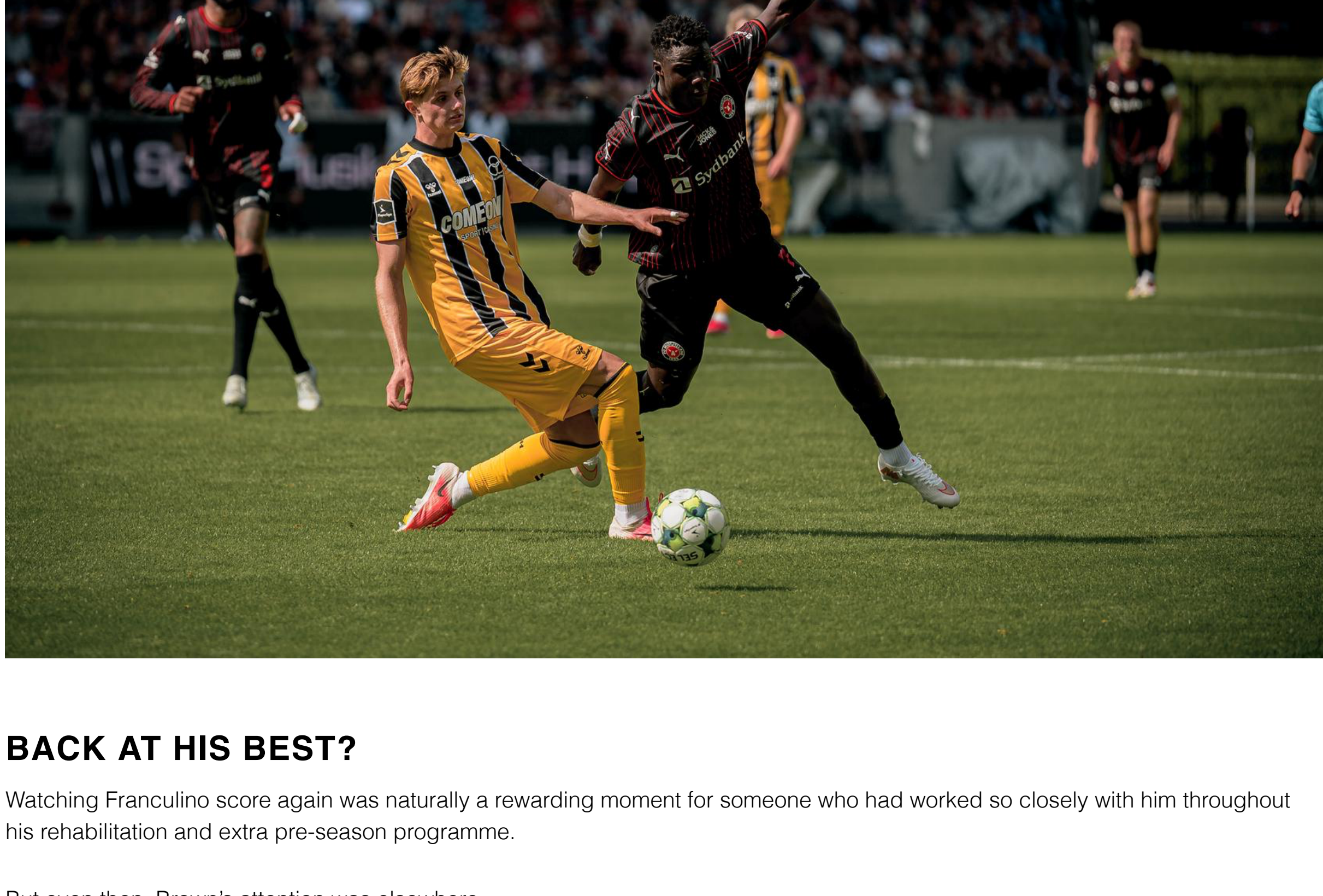
– From an injury perspective, that's incredibly encouraging. What's even more pleasing is that these numbers are actually different from what we saw before the injury.

– We've worked hard on improving his ability to produce repeated high-intensity sprints, and now we're seeing the results. He's added another dimension to his game and has the capacity to repeat those actions far more consistently than before.

That philosophy applies to every long-term injury at FC Midtjylland. Rather than simply focusing on getting players fit again, the club sees rehabilitation as an opportunity to help them come back even stronger.

– Whenever we know a player is going to be sidelined for a long period, we ask ourselves one question: how can we use that time not only to heal the injury, but to help the player come back as an even better footballer?

– We've analysed what Francu already does well, but we've also identified areas where he could improve. The programme we designed wasn't just about getting him back onto the pitch – it was about helping him develop new aspects of his game at the same time.



BACK AT HIS BEST?

Watching Franculino score again was naturally a rewarding moment for someone who had worked so closely with him throughout his rehabilitation and extra pre-season programme.

But even then, Brown's attention was elsewhere.

– Of course I've become very invested in Francu and his progress. But once the game kicks off, it's business as usual.

– When he scored the other day, I was actually watching his reaction more than to feel itself. Then he started dancing, and I knew he was enjoying the moment. During a match, though, you don't really have time to feel proud because there are plenty of other players to keep an eye on.

Still, seeing months of hard work rewarded is one of the most satisfying parts of the job.

– It's always special when you've worked closely with a player and you see him come back like that. It was exactly the same with Cho when he returned and scored his first goal.

– More than anything, I'm just happy to see Francu getting closer and closer to his very best again.