



ISHAQ RAFIU

STRIKER / WINGER

FORMER NIGERIA INTERNATIONAL

[TRANSFERMARKT LINK](#)

FACTS

2000

YEAR

179

CM

74

KG

NIGERIA

NATIONALITY

JUNE

2027

PRO CONTRACT

LEFT

STRONG FOOT

PROFILE

Ishaq Kayode Rafiu is a versatile modern attacker. Playing comfortably on 3 different positions in the final third, as a **(1) lone centre-forward**, also **(2) behind the striker** in 2-in-front formation, or on a **(3) winger** position with 3-in-front, preferably on the left side. He is very agile and physical, with one of the most explosive and quickest 3-4 first steps in Slovenian first league. He is mobile, enabling to stretch the pitch, with great direct 1v1 punch, clinical finishes, especially with his left. Has good right foot but is still developing. In aerial duels he is strong, his vertical is decent, even against taller centre-backs. Football IQ is on point, he is very unselfish and always looking to play for teams' best outcomes. He understands and reads the positional game, his physicality and speed along with good positioning allows him to open up multiple dangerous transitional plays per match. With his strong body he holds a ball possession very well before dropping a correct pass. On a defensive side his energy and pacing presses force the opponents into mistakes, breaking the line.

Early Career in Nigeria

Ishaq began his football journey with **Abraysports** before making his professional debut with **Shooting Stars** in the Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL) during the 2017 season, where he made two appearances. In 2019, he had a brief stint with Remo Stars. Later that year, he joined **Rivers United**, where he found significant success. Over three seasons, he made 60 appearances and scored 15 goals. **Notably, in the 2021–22 season, Ishaq netted 14 goals and provided three assists**, playing a pivotal role in Rivers United clinching the NPFL title.

Move to Europe: NK Maribor

Despite official offers from clubs in 1st division Portugal, Holland, Turkey and Belgium, **Ishaq** decided to join Slovenian serial champion side **NK Maribor** signing a three-year contract with them, However, the transfer was marred by complications, as his former club claimed his contract was still valid, leading to delays in his registration. While the issue on his registration was resolving slower than expected, NK Maribor needed a player on this position and they quickly signed **Josip Iličić** from **Atalanta FC**, club legend and one of the best on his position in Europe at the time, and Algerian **Hilal Soudani**. All these event, along with limited playing time made Ishaq's tenure at Maribor challenging; he made only six league appearances without scoring. Additionally, administrative issues, including visa complications, hindered his ability to return to Slovenia after visiting Nigeria, further limiting his impact at the club.

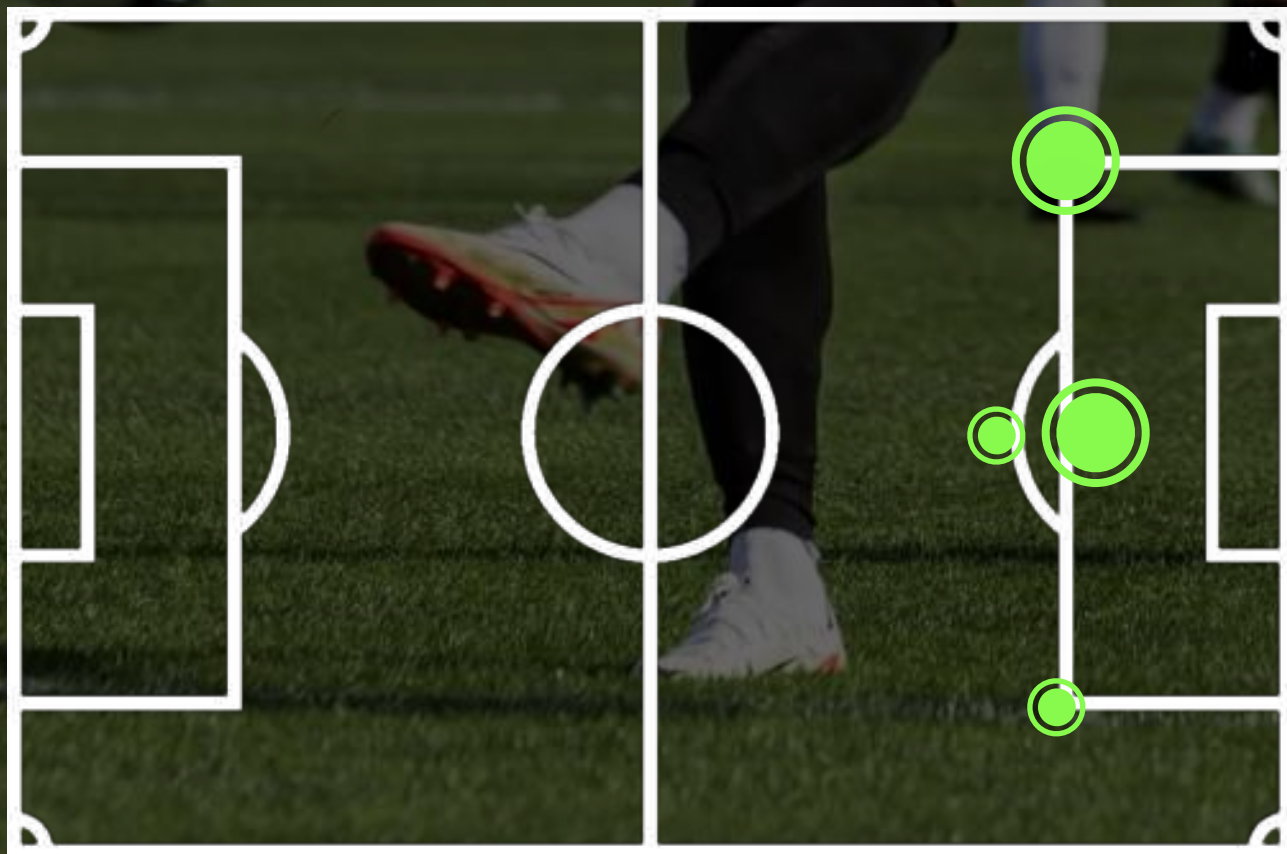
New Chapter: ND Primorje

Following his early departure from Maribor in 2024, Ishaq sought to revive his career with ND Primorje, a club newly promoted to the Slovenian 1st division. He joined the team during their pre-season preparations, aiming to secure a spot in the squad. Ishaq became one of the crucial players for club's successes in the league. His constant involvement in the attack, by scoring or assisting brought him back much needed confidence he had in the Nigerian league. His performances raised a lot of interest from the clubs in the region and he received three concrete offers, but as he stayed loyal to the club that helped him revive his football pathway, he just recently signed **a contract extension with ND Primorje**. Ishaq is now a centre piece of the team that has comfortably secured their spot in 1st division, playing regularly and making impact in every match regardless of the opponent. He completely re-established himself as Primorje's best player and due to a high interest in him it is likely that he will be transferred in Summer 2025.

CLUBS



POSITIONS



NIGERIA NATIONAL TEAM

Friendly match against Mexico

Ishaq made his debut play in Nigeria's friendly match against **Mexico in Dallas, USA on May 29th, 2022**. Through his good performances in the Nigerian Premier League and top scorer position in 2021/22, he earned his spot to be among the best to represent his country on a big stage.



Mexico vs. Nigeria (Rafiu #17)
Friendly match,
29 May 2022, Dallas USA



Ishaq Rafiu & Alex Iwobi
Mexico vs. Nigeria
29 May 2022, Dallas USA



Best Players in NPFL in 2021/22
Ishaq Rafiu scoring 14 goals and 3 assists

PLAYING STYLE & ATTRIBUTES

Ishaq is best described as an **explosive and agile forward** who thrives on space, acceleration, and high-intensity transitions. While he can play across the front line, he's most dangerous as a **wide forward cutting inside onto his stronger left foot or left-sided winger**. His game is built on **pace, dribbling, and off-the-ball runs**, making him a nightmare for defenders, especially in open-field situations.

He plays with a fearless mentality, constantly looking to stretch defenses, beat his man, or burst into dangerous zones behind the backline.



ND Primorje vs. NK Maribor
1.SNL league match
March 2025



ND Primorje vs. NK Olimpija
1.SNL league match
April 2025



NK Lokomotiva Zagreb vs ND Primorje
Pre-season friendly match
February 2025

Physical Attributes

- **Speed & Acceleration:** Ishaq is one of the most explosive players in Slovenia. His **burst over the first 10-15 meters** is lethal, giving him a major advantage in counter-attacks and 1v1 duels.
- **Agility & Balance:** His low center of gravity and strong core make him highly agile. He shifts direction effortlessly and is extremely hard to knock off the ball when at full speed.
- **Stamina & Work Rate:** High-energy player who tracks back defensively and presses intensely from the front. Rarely static—**constantly moving, offering outlets, and applying pressure**.

Technical Attributes

- **Finishing:** A sharp finisher, especially when cutting in from the left. He's good at low-driven shots across goal and has shown composure in 1v1 situations. Still developing his consistency in front of goal.
- **Passing & Combination Play:** Ishaq plays quick, short passes and is improving in link-up play. While not a traditional playmaker, he's capable of smart through balls and cutbacks after beating his man.
- **Crossing & Wide Play:** Prefers to cut inside rather than go to the byline, but he can deliver effective low crosses or pullbacks into the box.



ND Primorje
Training Session
January 2025

ND Primorje vs. NK Olimpija
1.SNL league match
April 2025



NK Rijeka vs ND Primorje
Pre-season friendly match
February 2025

Mental & Tactical Attributes

- **Off-the-Ball Movement:** Exceptional in timing runs in behind the defense. Always on the shoulder of the last man and loves to exploit gaps created by high defensive lines.
- **Decision-Making:** Still developing. At times, he can be too direct or take on one too many defenders, but he's improving with maturity and coaching.
- **Composure Under Pressure:** Shows confidence he used to have. Doesn't shy away from responsibility—whether it's taking on defenders, drawing fouls, or creating moments of brilliance.
- **Versatility:** While best as a left winger, Ishaq can also play as a central striker or on the right. His adaptability makes him valuable in various tactical systems.
- **Link-up play:** Improving, but not a traditional "hold-up" forward

CONCLUSION

Ishaq Rafiu is a modern, high-octane forward with elite pace, dribbling, and pressing ability. He's most effective when given space to run into and thrives in transition-heavy systems. While still polishing aspects of his game, his **natural explosiveness, flair, and attacking instincts** make him one of Slovenia's most exciting foreign talents and a player with a great potential at the higher level..

When it comes to his personality Ishaq is a quiet man of faith, a disciplined hard worker, with positive attitude that have an immediate impact on the team. He speaks English very well.



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