

54. Guillermo Ochoa

Club: AC Ajaccio

Date of Birth: 13th July 1985

Position: Goalkeeper



Ligue 1 is becoming noted for the array of world class attacking talent that it contains. With the addition of Edinson Cavani and Radamel Falcao, paralleled with the exquisite talent of Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Le Championnat now boasts some of the most fearsome strikers in world football. However, away from the internationally renowned goal-scorers, France's top football division also boasts an impressive array of exceptional goalkeepers. One such keeper is AC Ajaccio's Guillermo Ochoa, the big-haired Mexican.

Ochoa is, above all, a superb shot stopper. His reactions are nippy; frequently he makes double, and sometimes even triple, saves, frantically flinging himself across his goal to keep the ball out. It will be a surprise to many people that Ochoa is still an AC Ajaccio player. The 28 year old has long been linked with a move away from Stade Francois Coty, with increasingly influential admirers expressing an interest in the Mexican. Before moving to Ajaccio, Ochoa was linked to Fulham, and more interestingly Manchester United, and since his time with ACA he has been reportedly a target for Villarreal and, most recently, Liverpool, as the Merseyside club looked recently for a replacement for Pepe Reina.

Despite this interest, Ochoa stayed with AC Ajaccio, a decision that chairman Alain Orsoni would have played an undoubtedly key role in. Ochoa's commitment to the Corsican club showcases the sort of professionalism that we seem to often lack in the modern game from its players. After Week 18 of this Ligue 1 campaign, Ajaccio are slumped in 19th place, seven points from safety, with only a single point in their last five games. The club have not kept a clean sheet in Ligue 1 since August, and it is likely that, if performances and results do not pick up, then Ochoa could begin the next season at another club. The stopper is too good to be playing second division football, especially as he has established himself as Mexico's number one goalkeeper as the World Cup approaches.

Ochoa, who has won AC Ajaccio's Player of the Year award for the last two years in a row, is set to start in goal for Mexico when they compete in Brazil in 2014. The Mexican side needed a play-off victory over New Zealand to seal their place in the final tournament, after a generally uninspiring campaign. Ochoa, who's appearance against Costa Rica in October took him to 55 international appearances, will be a key part of Miguel Herrera's plans, despite his rocky relationship with the national side, as *El Tricolor* look to negotiate a tricky Group A which includes hosts Brazil.

Ochoa's performances in the second half of the calendar year have largely been mixed for Ajaccio. Blame for the team's lowly form cannot be laid at his door alone, indeed the Mexican has put in a few sensational performances. The highlight of these, quite possibly the highlight of Ochoa's 2013, was a heroic performance against the mighty PSG near the start of the season. Ajaccio miraculously held the current league leaders 1-1 away in the cauldron of noise that is the Parc des Princes.

PSG had a total of 39 shots on goal, and Ochoa pulled off 12 saves, some of them truly incredible. A smart double save from an initial Ibrahimovic free kick, and then the rebound stop from Javier Pastore was the first of many fine pieces of goalkeeping that Ochoa produced over the course of 90 minutes. Cavani, Ibrahimovic, and numerous other PSG players were denied, as Ajaccio looked set to hang on for an improbable, memorable victory. With time ticking away, Edinson Cavani struck to cost the Corsican side a famous three points. Ochoa earned great praise for his heroics in the game, and the performance has seen his stock rise despite Ajaccio's lowly position.

What the future holds for Ochoa is uncertain. Ajaccio are in a lot of trouble at the foot of Ligue 1, and are among the favourites to be relegated when the season culminates in May of next year. For Ochoa, who's deal with Ajaccio last until June of 2014, relegation will surely see him move. Performances such as the superb display against PSG have raised the keeper's European and indeed global profile, but if he, although this is unlikely, stays with Ajaccio then he is in danger of dropping off the radar. As previously mentioned, Ochoa has come close to moving to a bigger side in recent years, and for him to build on a good 2013, 2014 should see the 'keeper move on.

'The level of football in France is ever-increasing.'

Guillermo Ochoa

22nd February 2013

DID YOU KNOW? Guillermo Ochoa's football inspirations are Peter Schmeichel and Oscar Cordoba.