

99. Ronald Zubar

Club: AC Ajaccio

Date of Birth: 20th September 1985

Position: Defender



Since his January 2013 move from English side Wolverhampton Wanderers, Zubar's form has been impressive at his new club, and is slowly succeeding in removing any lingering memories of his ill-fated time at Marseille. He is a leading figure in the Ajaccio dressing room, which is just as well as they will need all of his experience and qualities to get out of trouble in the New Year.

Standing at a tall 6ft1 and with a stocky build, Zubar's main assets are his strength and his aerial prowess. In 2013, he won over 65% of his aerial duels which means he is not only solid defensively but is also a threat going forward from set pieces. This generally compensates for his lack of agility and sometimes clumsy footing. You will often see him getting his body in the way of strikers to prevent them from getting past him, rather than letting them knock the ball past him and hoping to beat them in a footrace. At the age of 28, Zubar is becoming increasingly reliant on his varied experiences in the game to decide how best to approach each situation. A quality that Ajaccio hold dear, with a squad largely devoid of experience.

What has been particularly impressive about Zubar in this campaign is how he has managed to forget about his past difficulties in his career to start afresh in Ligue 1 and cement his place as a key player in Ajaccio's ongoing bid to hold onto their top flight status. During his time at Marseille, Zubar's main weakness was brutally highlighted, both by the media and by the fans themselves. He had a tendency to commit a series of stupid errors, which would often lead directly to goals, and soon enough he left the club because he could no longer take the constant criticism. His move to Wolverhampton Wanderers in the English Premier League turned out to be ideal for his career.

In England, he had to face up to the physicality and brutal nature of the English game. This hardened Zubar's character, and helped eradicate the errors that had previously plagued his game. At Ajaccio, he has returned to the high level of performance that was evident at Caen before he joined Marseille in 2006.

Unfortunately, in the weeks leading up to the New Year, Zubar has been out injured from the Ajaccio team because of a thigh strain. When we look at the statistics, we can see that Zubar has indeed made a difference to Ajaccio's defence. In the games that Zubar played early in the season, Ajaccio conceded on average less than 1.5 goals per game. In the games for which he was injured, Ajaccio conceded comfortably over 2 goals per game, and only picked up 1 point from a possible 4 games. This shows how important Zubar is to the team defensively, and that his leadership skills are missed when he is not in the squad.

Ajaccio are currently in the bottom three in Ligue 1, and have been there since early October, so they will be in desperate need of some stability in the New Year, particularly along the back four to clean up their defensive record, which is one of the worst in the league. The fitness of Ronald Zubar, a seasoned defender who has experienced the trials of a relegation battle before in England, will be a major factor in determining whether Ajaccio survive this season or not.

In 2013, but particularly in the 2012/13 season, Ronald Zubar has demonstrated that he can still play at the highest level of French football. He has put his previous Ligue 1 troubles behind him, and is producing solid performances for Ajaccio in their quest to avoid relegation to Ligue 2. It is testament to the mental toughness of the man that he has been able to achieve such success during this calendar year.

'I was not lost in England! This club [Ajaccio] has made great progress. We must be ambitious.'

Ronald Zubar

22nd June 2013

Quotes of the Year: Zlatan Ibrahimovic: "Some say that I'm cocky, arrogant and have a bad character. If they meet me they will change their view. Don't judge me when you don't know me."