

## 12. Salvatore Sirigu

Club: Paris Saint Germain

Date of Birth: 12th January 1987

Position: Goalkeeper

Often, the first name on the manager's team sheet is that of his goalkeeper. The reliant pillar, forming the backbone of the defence. How accomplished the side that a manager is managing usually determines the strength of that pillar. After 2013, Paris Saint Germain can have no doubts about the fortitude of their pillar, Salvatore Sirigu, as the club looks to become the best in Europe.

With an amazing 16 league clean sheets this year, including nine already this season, Salvatore Sirigu has proved this year that, despite the amazing run by Vincent Enyeama, he is quite possibly the best goalkeeper in Ligue 1. One would be forgiven for presuming that the majority of these were due more to a proficient defence with the likes of Thiago Silva contained within it, but the fact remains that Sirigu has produced countless match winning saves and kept the opposition at bay on many occasions. Sirigu started this year in wonderful fashion as he did not concede a goal from mid-November to the start of February 2013 in the league.

Have signed from Palermo in 2011, Sirigu has gone on to become a key player for the French club, and rather unbelievably, is one of the club's longest servants due to the arrival of many new faces in recent years. Sirigu's highlight of the year will undoubtedly be lifting the coveted Ligue 1 trophy in summer after winning the league with PSG, as it was his first major honour in his professional career, and one which he played a terrific part in. PSG have the best defensive record in Ligue 1 this calendar year and without Sirigu, one wonders whether this would still be the case. At the back end of last season, when Sirigu was rested for certain fixtures, PSG conceded a goal a game, and this is a distinctly higher figure than when the Italian has been between the sticks.

Sirigu has proved himself to be very athletic despite his 6 ft 4 stature. Due to this towering height, Sirigu is an intense presence in the air and is often able to claim the ball from the air in order to avert danger from set pieces. Sirigu's positioning, most notably in open play, has also improved momentarily this year, proving that despite being 27 year old, his reading of the game and therefore his general play continues to improve season after season. Effective positioning was something that the Italian was perhaps lacking during his first season with PSG in the 2011/12 season and has now been addressed, highlighting his development over the course of the last twelve months.



The Italian will be delighted with PSG's form this year and especially as they enter 2014 in divine form in both the league and the Champions League. The entire side seems to have made a step up from last season and Sirigu is of course personally included in this. They look unbeatable in the league and could have an outside chance in achieving the ultimate goal of winning the Champions League if they are able to maintain this newfound direct style of play, whilst continuing to protect Sirigu and his goal in defence. Sirigu's position does not seem in any way under threat and so one would expect him to be heavily involved in the upcoming battles ahead.

Sirigu's ability to focus during long periods of a match, whereby Paris Saint Germain's dominance may mean that he is rarely involved at times, is one of his main strengths and like the best keepers. He has also yet to replicate some of the handling howlers, which we saw from Sirigu during the 2012/2013 campaign, and has proved to be a fantastic acquisition for the French side.

Like every player, there are still aspects of Sirigu's game that could do with further refinement and addressing. There are still instances, often during crucial games, where Sirigu's unstable footing becomes an unwelcome hindrance. When the ball is played back to him by a defender in open play, he does can appear nervous and a little clumsy, often tending to boot the ball out of play and thus, giving the possession back to the opposition, which only causes a further build-up of pressure on the Italian's shoulders. At the age of 27, Sirigu, for a goalkeeper, this failing may yet to be rectified.

Internationally, the Italian has played scarcely for coach Prandelli, most recently against Nigeria, and still remains behind Buffon in the pecking order for the national side. He does appear to be the keeper for his country's international future, as when Buffon retires, he will surely step in to fill the gap. In his performances for Italy this year, however, he has looked calm and assured and will go to Rio as an understudy this summer.

Overall, therefore, it has been a wonderful year for the Italian, where he has won major honours and has shown himself to be Ligue 1's best goalkeeper, evidenced by his winning of the 2013 UNFP award as the best player in that position.

*'I will celebrate this with my teammates first and foremost.'*

Salvatore Sirigu

On his UNFP award- 19th May 2013

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