**PREDATOR PORTRAIT**

**CHRISTIANE ENDLER**

**BY AMIE CRIPPS, VERSUS**

Christiane Endler is the best goalkeeper in women’s football. Facts. After finishing second place for the last two years, the Chilean and Olympique Lyonnais No.1 won this year’s Best FIFA Women’s Goalkeeper award. The first South American player in history to claim the prize. But breaking records is just what Endler does.

While playing for Paris St Germain she put an end to Lyon’s dominance in the Division 1 Féminine by helping her former club win their first-ever league title. She also captained Chile to the finals of the Copa America Femenina in 2018 where they finished runners-up. A feat her country had only achieved once before in 1991. Endler’s standout performance during that tournament secured Chile’s first Women’s World Cup qualification. Later that year, Endler won her first title with Chile by beating Brazil in the Torneo Internacional Femenino de Sao Paulo. La Roja Femenina’s first victory against Brazil in 13 matches. Endler didn’t concede a single goal during the tournament. Her list of achievements is never-ending. Last summer, Endler once again captained Chile at their first Olympic Games. Yet the South American superstar didn't always start out playing, or even wanting to be a goalkeeper.

“I grew up playing many different sports because I never really had the chance to play football. I loved every single sport I played, but football was always my passion. And I think I tried my hand at so many different things to try and ‘fill’ that passion.” Playing football with her brother was how her love of the game started. “I always played football with him - he was my idol - and because of that…I always ended up in the goal! But when I started to play for a team, I realised I wanted to be a striker.” But while trialing for Chile’s U17 national team, Endler was encouraged to try her hand at goalkeeping due to her height. A move that quite literally, fitted Endler like a glove.

Growing up, Endler didn’t have many - if any - female footballing role models. Something she has changed single-handedly for girls all over the world. Especially those from Chile.

“I watched a lot of football growing up and one of my first ‘big’ goalkeeping heroes was Oliver Kahn. I remember him playing in the World Cup and he was amazing. Claudio Bravo has also been such a great player for me. A real Chilean hero. Those players inspired me, and now I am inspiring others.” Something she realises has been possible because of the support of her home country.

“The support I have in Chile is amazing. I can see every day how proud people are of me and my achievements. It’s a huge thing for girls who are starting out now, because they have someone showing them, they can also achieve whatever they want. That’s very important to me. I am working with a Chilean school to provide better conditions for girls who want to play football. Myself and other girls from the national team are opening doors for the next generation of players.” Seeing is believing, and Endler works tirelessly to ensure those who follow in her footsteps can keep on shining and pushing the women’s game forward.

“I think there is a lot of room for progression in women’s football, especially goalkeeping. Coaches for example are so important for our development and taking things to the next level. I’d say, not every club has the ‘right’ person in charge of ensuring that coaches are receiving the most up-to-date training. The game has changed a lot! And making sure that you are constantly learning in order to keep up with those changes is vital. The position has also developed a lot over the years. You now have to be great with your feet as well as your hands. You’re another player on the pitch. So making sure coaches are aware of changes, the latest techniques and technology to help goalkeepers be the best they can be, is so important.” And to those who suggest female GKs should use smaller goals, Endler has something to say to you: “I do not agree with that at all. We’ve shown time and time again that we are great goalkeepers. In some instances, we perform better than the men! We don’t need smaller goals. The game is about scoring. You cannot stop every ball from hitting the back of the net. We need to make sure the position continues to receive the support it needs in order to develop further.”

Long-term investment in women’s football is something Endler has recognised and valued from the beginning. Especially when it comes to wearing the right boots and gloves. And her German heritage has always meant she’s had a soft spot for the ‘Three Stripes Family’. “adidas boots were the boots I wore for my national debut playing with Chile’s U17s’ side in the South American Cup. When my dad returned from a trip to Germany, he brought me back the boots David Beckham wore! I remember them very well because of that. I’ve always felt very ‘represented’ by adidas. We share the same values. They were also the first brand to ‘bet on me’. They’ve supported me from the beginning.” Despite that, Endler could not have envisioned being the face of a Predator campaign fifteen years down the line.

“I never thought I was going to be a part of such a huge campaign like this! The most important thing about Predator Edge is that it’s putting women’s football on the platform it deserves. And to just have female athletes in this campaign, is a huge step for sport in general. To show that women can lead something of this scale. It should happen more often. But for this to happen to a girl from Chile. It’s unbelievable.”

Endler has inspired a generation of girls to not only take up football, but to put on a pair of gloves. A position that forces you to put your body on the line. Something she herself has no regrets about. “I think that everything happens for a reason. You are where you are in your life because of the good and bad decisions you’ve made. You’re exactly where you’re supposed to be. Just make sure you dream big and work hard. To play Champions League or World Cup football, are experiences you’ll never forget. But you have to make sure you really want them. Sometimes it can be a lonely existence, but your passion pulls you through.”

She might be putting the game on a pedestal, but Endler is on a whole different level. And she’s right. She is exactly where she should be. At the very top.