**PREDATOR PORTRAIT**

**WENDIE RENARD**

**BY AMIE CRIPPS, VERSUS**

Wendie Renard is a household name in France, but her reputation for being arguably the best defender of her generation knows no bounds.

Standing at 6ft2in tall, she is quite literally - and figuratively - head and shoulders above the rest. Her trophy cabinet proves it: 14 Division 1 Féminine titles. Nine Coup de France and seven Champions League titles. Not to mention the two Cyprus Cups as well as the SheBelieves Cup she’s won for Les Bleus. Renard was born to win, there’s no two ways about it. But more than that, she was born to lead.

Once described as an ‘institution’, the Olympique Lyonnais captain has made over 400 appearances for L’OL since signing in 2006. She joined the French giants at the tender age of sixteen, having travelled alone from Martinique to make her mark. A decision she’s never regretted. “It was hard to play football and be successful in Martinique due to the lack of visibility. There were very few opportunities for me as a female footballer, so in that sense, it wasn’t hard for me to leave at all. I had to travel alone, and I knew it’d be difficult leaving my mother and there’d be some financial difficulties. But I knew Martiniquais players had done it before - like Joan Hartock - so I never felt out of place.” Even from a young age, Renard has always been determined to reach the dizzying heights of the beautiful game.

As a child, after watching French footballing star Marinette Pichon play on TV, she made a promise to her mother: “One day, I will wear that shirt.” And she kept her word. She’s since gone on to wear it over 100 times, and even donned France’s captain armband between 2013 - 2017. Since making her senior debut over a decade ago, Renard has represented her country at two World Cups and Olympic Games. Not bad for a girl from an island with a population less than half a million. Renard’s desire to be the best has always translated to her performances on the pitch, and the world has been quick to recognise it.

In recent years, the 32-year-old has been named part of the UEFA Women’s Championship All-Star Team, FIFA Women’s World Cup All Star and Dream Team, IFFHS Women’s World Team, and was the first recipient of the UEFA Women’s Champions League Defender of the Season award. Winning is a key part of Renard’s DNA, but her love of football transcends accolades. “When I am on a pitch, I want to win of course! I am a competitor! But something that inspires me more than that is the collective effort needed in football. You have to work together in order to succeed. You have to work together as a team for the full 90 minutes. You have to remain professional until the very last minute.” There is no ‘i’ in ‘team’, and Renard knows it. But when it comes to making sure she has the edge, she’s always known exactly what to do. Even down to her boots.

“I’ve always been an adidas girl! This brand has a lot of ‘class’. The emblem has always been quite iconic. My first pair of boots were of course adidas, they were the F50s. Back in the days of velcro! adidas does exceptional things with boots when it comes to ball mastery, because their boots are so sensitive to players’ movements. I have seen boots evolve over the years, but it’s always been really important to make sure you feel comfortable. It’s one less thing to worry about when it comes to preparing for a game. If your boots can help you control the ball, help with power and support you for the entire match, they can bring a lot to your performance.”

Some things just make sense, and Renard being inducted to the unofficial Predator hall of fame as part of the Predator Edge campaign is one of them. Legends like David Beckham and Zinedine Zidane may have started a tradition of elite ballers wearing Predators, but Renard is taking things to the next level alongside some of the best women’s players in the world. And she’s more than ready for the challenge. “I’ve always said that I want to make a name for myself in football, and being a part of this campaign definitely means my name will be written in the history books. It’s a proud moment for me, as it feels like a moment of recognition. It also feels like football is moving forward. A few years ago, a female-focused campaign might not have been possible, hopefully this campaign provides impetus that it is possible. Predator Edge shows that football is one sport - there shouldn’t be differences between how female and male players are treated.”

Like most greats, Renard is never content. She wants more. She wants to keep pushing the game to new limits, and achieving new milestones. One way she understands she can do that is by empowering the next generation of Predator Edge superstars. “My advice to any young player is always to believe in yourself. There will be people who tell you: ‘this is going to be really hard; you’re going to encounter so many obstacles.’ But as long as you have that inner determination to succeed, you will go far. For me, dreams are achievable from the moment we create them. You just have to go for it!”