

Racing to the top

ARGENTINA. Racing Club's Torneo Apertura title culminated one of the greatest comebacks in Argentine history.

Saved from bankruptcy two years ago when it was declared a national treasure, Racing won its first title in 35 years, claiming the first stage of the Argentine season.

Its 1-1 tie at Velez Sarsfield was enough to edge River Plate, a 6-1 winner over Rosario Central, by one point.

Racing's participation in the 1999-2000 campaign was delayed because of its financial problems. The club was saved when the Argentine government gave in to pressure from fans and declared it a national treasure.

It wasn't the first time Racing received government support.

Racing had struggled for many years after being one of the most powerful clubs in Argentina.

It was founded in 1905 and named after Racing Club de Paris by the French immigrants who ran the club.

Two years after joining the First Division in 1911, Racing won the first of seven straight titles.

With the advent of professionalism in the 1930s, River Plate and Boca Juniors became the two biggest clubs in the Buenos Aires area, but Racing's fortunes were revived by Ramon Cerejio, minister of finance in the Peronist government. Racing won three titles in a row in 1949-51.

Racing's last Argentine title came in 1966. A year later, it won the Libertadores Cup and became the first Argentine team to win the Intercontinental Cup.

Thousands of Racing fans traveled to Velez's Jose Amalfitani Stadium for the deciding game of Torneo Apertura. Thousands more watched the game on a giant screen at Racing Stadium in the industrial suburb of Avellaneda.

They filled both stadium with cries of "La Acadé! La Acadé!" Racing's nickname is "The Academy," in reference to its historic place in Argentina soccer.

The Velez-Racing and River-Central games were the only games played on the final day of the Torneo Apertura. They were supposed to be played two days before Christmas but were postponed for four days because of widespread rioting. The other final round matches were canceled.

Security officials ordered the games postponed after 27 people were killed in riots to protest the Argentine government's extreme economic measures.

— Paul Kennedy



MARCOS HAUPAREUTERS

Racing Club's Francisco Maciel (left) and Carlos Arano hold up a fake trophy for the thousands of Racing fans who watched their club take the Argentine title.