

## Clubs see red

**FRANCE.** Attendance at French First Division matches increased 38 percent in the three seasons since France hosted the 1998 World Cup, but it has had little effect on the bottom line.

Despite huge increases in ticket sales and television revenues, French clubs find themselves deep in the red.

French national league (LNF) president Gerard Bourgion reported that First Division clubs had cumulative debts of \$250 million at the end of the 2000-01 season. They had losses of \$44 million last season, compared to profits of \$38 million in 1990-2000. The 2000-01 financial reports didn't include Toulouse, which went bankrupt at the end of the 2000-01 season.

Marseille, France's most popular club with average attendance of 50,814 last season, lost almost \$37 million since 1996. There's been speculation that French television network Canal Plus is set to sell its 90 percent interest in Paris St. Germain.

"If the indebtedness resulted from productive investments, such as stadium construction, that wouldn't be a problem," Didier Taupin, a management consultant with Deloitte & Touche, told *France Football*. "But French clubs are in the red because of buying and paying players."

Figures for 1999-2000 bely France's reputation as an exporter of soccer talent. First Division clubs spent \$105 million more on players than they generated in transfer fees. In attempt to keep young players from moving abroad, player compensation increased 90 percent since 1998. French club presidents complain they have to pay higher taxes and make higher social security contributions than clubs in other major European countries.

French clubs had only recently recovered from heavy indebtedness in the late 1980s and early '90s thanks to an LNF austerity program. They also weaned themselves off *subventions*, local government subsidies on which they depended to stay afloat. Subsidies have been cut in half the last five years.

Few believe the LNF can take the lead again to get its clubs out of the red.

Bourgion, elected LNF president in 2000, is accused of spending too much time on business (he's the former *roi du poulet*, France's biggest poultry producer) and politics (he's the head of the far-right CNI party) and too little on pro soccer.

— Paul Kennedy



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**Will Brazilians Alex (right) and Ronaldinho have new owners at PSG?**