



Management Report on a Sports Organization: French Football Team

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Abstract: This paper provides a thorough examination of the French football management system, highlighting its distinctive features within Western Europe characterized by substantial administrative intervention. Emphasizing the significant influence of governmental oversight, it explores how this intervention has shaped both the national team and domestic football, contributing to notable successes such as World Cup and European Championship victories. By delving into the motivations behind this governance model and analyzing its socio-economic foundations, the study offers valuable insights into the unique characteristics of French football management. Moreover, it identifies and scrutinizes contemporary challenges confronting French professional football, aiming to contribute to broader reform initiatives within the global football system. Through scholarly discourse, the paper presents a comprehensive analysis of French football management, elucidating its complexities and underlying rationale.

Keywords: football governance, financial supervision, youth development, government support, talent retention

1. Introduction

The sports management paradigm in France differs notably from prevailing European models by integrating official and private cooperation systems. This system comprises four key organizational pillars: CNOSF, CROS, CDOS, and sports clubs, with the Ministry of Youth and Sports serving as the pivotal state administrative agency overseeing sports management.

This multifaceted sports management system significantly influences the French Football Association (FFA). It establishes a distinct advantage through clear delineation of responsibilities between the government and the Football Association, fostering synergy to optimize their competencies. The government focuses on macro-management and regulation, while the Football Association attends to football-specific matters, facilitating effective execution of macro-management. This collaborative approach channels societal enthusiasm into football-related activities, catering to diverse public demands.

At the national level, the FFA collaborates with CNOSF to align football with broader national sports initiatives, benefiting from expertise and resources. This collaboration extends regionally and departmentally through CROS and CDOS, ensuring football development aligns with local needs. Football clubs, as key stakeholders, contribute to grassroots development, connected to local football associations.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports acts as the linchpin, unifying diverse elements and translating broader sports policies into actionable football strategies. This collaborative model optimizes division of labor and ensures a holistic approach, reflecting regional variations and grassroots participation. The success of French football exemplifies the effectiveness of this balanced and collaborative sports management system.

2. Critical analysis of key organizational challenges

2.1 Management department

The efficacy of the French sports management system hinges significantly upon the Ministry of Sports, which underwent substantial reforms in the 1980s leading to its formal establishment. Headquartered in Paris, this ministry operates under the auspices of the Prime Minister and encompasses three pivotal departments: Physical Education, Personnel Management, and Employment and Training.

Despite its well-organized structure, the system grapples with persistent challenges, including the imperative for continual adaptation to evolving demands, the delicate balance between educational and sports priorities, and the harmonization of central oversight with regional autonomy.

Meanwhile, the French Football Association, established in 1919, assumes a critical role in football governance within

the country[1]. Operating as a non-governmental association, it exercises oversight over clubs, competitions, and player development, all within the regulatory framework established by the government.

The Association's governance structure reflects decentralization, with regional, provincial, and county-level football associations playing essential roles in both professional and grassroots football. It manages diverse leagues, tournaments, and educational programs, highlighting its multifaceted involvement in French football governance.

Formal collaboration between the government and the Football Association is institutionalized through annual agreements, delineating developmental objectives and financial support. Oversight by the Ministry of Sports ensures adherence to these agreements, fostering accountability and collaborative engagement.

While the Association enjoys operational autonomy, it remains subject to financial scrutiny by the National Court of Auditors. Local governments significantly contribute to sports funding, facility maintenance, and club support, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between governmental entities and football clubs.

2.2 Financial scandal

The tumultuous periods of the 1970s and 1980s in French football were characterized by a series of financial scandals, prompting a pivotal shift in governance. In response, France took a pioneering step in 1991 with the establishment of the Direction Nationale du Contrôle de Gestion (DNCG), an independent body under the French Football Association[2]. The DNCG serves as a safeguard against financial improprieties within football clubs, with a mandate focused on preserving the integrity and fiscal health of the sport.

Key responsibilities of the DNCG include meticulous assessments of financial risks associated with player transfers, insurance arrangements, bonuses, and player contracts. Additionally, the DNCG ensures clubs' compliance with relevant laws and regulations, as well as the alignment of investments with long-term developmental goals. Through comprehensive audits, the DNCG scrutinizes club budgets, player wages, television broadcast revenues, expenditures on agents, and other financial aspects to ensure transparency and accountability.

Crucially, the DNCG works to prevent the formation of economic bubbles within football clubs, mitigating risks associated with overleveraging and speculative financial practices. Unlike some European leagues, where clubs may face existential crises due to unsustainable financial practices, the DNCG implements punitive measures, including recruitment restrictions and demotion, to maintain financial prudence and stability.

Historically, the DNCG's intervention has resulted in tangible consequences for clubs like Marseille and Monaco, underscoring its commitment to preserving financial integrity and sustainability within French football. In essence, the DNCG serves as a bulwark against financial malfeasance, ensuring transparency and resilience in the French football landscape.

2.3 Youth training

Acknowledging the triumphs of French football necessitates recognizing the pivotal role played by the National Technical Directorate (DTN), established by the French Football Association in the 1950s under Gerard Houllier's leadership. Initially focused on overseeing the development of the national team, the DTN expanded its mandate in 1974 to include voluntary training programs for club teams aspiring to professional status, with a primary emphasis on enhancing the skills of young players and promoting their integration into society[3].

In the early 1990s, the DTN launched a transformative youth development program across seven football centers nationwide, aiming to cultivate technical proficiency in a new generation of players. This initiative underscores the DTN's commitment to holistic player development beyond mere on-field skills, promoting a rational and sustainable management system within football clubs.

A compelling case study of the DTN's efficacy is Clairefontaine, established in 1988 as the pinnacle of youth development. This state-of-the-art institute, located in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines, exemplifies the DTN's visionary approach to nurturing talent. With a focus on holistic player development encompassing technical skills, academic education, and personal growth, Clairefontaine has produced numerous world-class players like Thierry Henry and Kylian Mbappé, contributing significantly to French football's success.

Clairefontaine's impact extends beyond individual success stories, serving as a model for youth academies worldwide and reinforcing the DTN's crucial role in shaping the future of French football. In essence, the DTN's commitment to youth training and player development, epitomized by Clairefontaine, underscores its pivotal role in fostering a generation of competitive and well-rounded players.

2.4 Alliance challenge

Professional Football in France has also encountered some difficulties. A coalition of big clubs has recently challenged

the LNF. The league wants clubs to pay lower taxes and players' salaries and, more importantly, to be given full television rights so that they can reap the full benefits of all matches. The group accused the LNF of monopolizing television rights and setting a policy that applies to professional football clubs across France without considering the need for bigger clubs to attract viewers. For these reasons, the organization has called for clubs to negotiate their television channels and partners and own all the revenues from their games. However, the Ministry of Youth and Sport has severely criticized these demands, which regards them as a rigged model to undermine the balance and equality between French professional football clubs. As a result, some big clubs, such as Marseille and Paris Saint-Germain, have joined the G14 to take on the French professional football league. The reason is the collision between France's football governance model, which combines public sports service with the state, and the football market economy liberalization. Another problem affecting the development of French football is that France's social labor costs are higher than the other four major leagues. France's national health, social security, and pension funds are not French football development but by a proportion of employers and workers' wages. Comparing the taxes and national insurance paid by players and clubs in France with those of the other four major leagues, it turns out that a player earning around 50,000 francs a month costs clubs more than three times the social cost. With similar salaries in Italy, Spain, Germany, and England, the clubs' financial burden is much lower.[4] Simultaneously, the average salary of professional players in French professional clubs is lower than that of the other four major leagues, which is why so many French stars have left.

The challenges faced by professional football in France, as outlined in the text, are indeed multifaceted and deeply intertwined with the unique governance model and economic landscape of the country. To further illustrate the complexities and potential ramifications, a case study involving the clash between big clubs, the LNF, and the broader football governance structure can be examined, with a focus on the G14's involvement.

2.5 Case study: G14 and the clash with French professional football league

The G14, an organization comprising elite European football clubs, including powerhouses like Marseille and Paris Saint-Germain from France, was formed with the aim of addressing issues related to the governance and economic aspects of football. The entry of French clubs into the G14 underscores the gravity of the challenges faced by these clubs within the existing football governance model in France.

The central point of contention revolves around the demand for greater financial autonomy by big clubs, challenging the policies set by the LNF (Ligue de Football Professionnel). The LNF's insistence on clubs paying lower taxes and having control over their television rights clashes with the Ministry of Youth and Sport's view of preserving balance and equality among professional football clubs.

One of the critical issues at play is the clash between the football governance model in France, which integrates public sports service with state oversight, and the liberalization of the football market economy. The push for financial autonomy and control over television rights represents a shift toward a more market-driven approach, diverging from the traditionally regulated and state-influenced model.

The social labor cost disparity further exacerbates the situation. The higher social labor costs in France, which are borne by both employers and workers, place a considerable financial burden on clubs compared to their counterparts in other major leagues. This financial strain, coupled with the comparatively lower average salaries of professional players in French clubs, prompts an exodus of French stars to leagues where financial conditions are more favorable.

In navigating these challenges, the case study highlights the delicate balance that needs to be struck between preserving the principles of equality within the football ecosystem and adapting to the changing dynamics of the global football market. The clash between the G14 clubs and the French Professional Football League serves as a microcosm of the broader tension between maintaining a state-influenced governance model and embracing market-driven liberalization.

The case study exemplifies how the clash between big clubs, football governance bodies, and economic realities in France reflects a broader paradigm shift within the football landscape. Navigating these challenges requires a nuanced approach that considers both the traditional values embedded in the French football governance model and the evolving demands of a market-oriented football economy.

3. Conclusion

French football management aligns closely with the country's political and economic system, where both state and society contribute to its development. The Ministry of Youth and Sport oversees football via the French Football Association, which governs the sport and supervises its education. The association focuses on organizing and managing football, with local authorities providing facilities and financial aid. While professional clubs seek various funding avenues, they face challenges due to France's high social costs, hindering competitiveness. Emphasis is placed on youth player development,

facilitated through football centers and club-run academies. To ensure financial stability, France employs a specialized committee to monitor club finances and prevent economic bubbles. Amateur, women's, youth, and corporate football are also prioritized in French football development.

France boasts a robust judicial system for regulating football, exemplified by the establishment of a financial supervision committee to ensure clubs' financial health and prevent economic bubbles. This system, unique among European football governing bodies, is supported by government funding and facilities, crucial for smaller professional clubs' sustainability.

The emphasis on training national youth football players is evident through the Football Technical Committee (DTN), tasked with enhancing youth football skills and tactics. France's seven football learning centers offer advanced training, alleviating pressure on club youth development. Notable successes include Nantes' football school, producing renowned players like Thierry Henry and Nicolas Anelka. However, lower salaries for professional players compared to other major leagues lead to a talent exodus.

Additionally, France prioritizes the construction of echelons and amateur football, evident in the establishment of various competitions beyond professional matches. This inclusive approach, while not commercially driven, fosters a consistent supply of talented players. French football management strikes a balance between societal public service principles and commercialization, reflecting a blend of traditional republican ideals and modern sports management practices not found elsewhere in Europe.

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