

Real make
record money

AFP, Madrid

Spanish giants Real Madrid's have announced a record 603.9 million-euro income (\$790 million £480.8 million) for the 2013-14 season thanks in large part to winning the Champions League for a 10th time in May.

Madrid's total revenue was up 10.9 percent on last season, with the net profit slightly up from 36.9 million euros last year to 38.5 million euros.

Real also slashed their net debt by 21 percent to 71.5 million euros.

However, despite strengthening their position as the richest club in world football, Real's board has come under fire for allowing key midfielders Angel di Maria and Xabi Alonso to leave in the final week of the transfer window last month for a combined 85 million euros.

Those departures came after the club made a combined 100 million euro splurge on World Cup stars James Rodriguez, Toni Kroos and Keylor Navas.

Madrid president Florentino Perez, though, defended his decision to allow Di Maria to leave, claiming the Argentine wanted a wage rise that would have seen him become the second highest-paid player at the club behind World Player of the Year Cristiano Ronaldo.

"He had economic demands that we could not satisfy. We made our best offer at the highest level we could and he did not accept it," he said.

"With the exception of Cristiano Ronaldo, who we all know is the best player in the world, no other player has that level of income."

"If we had accepted Di Maria's economic demands there would have been unequal treatment and it could put the economic stability of the club at risk."



PHOTO: REUTERS

France forward Loic Remy (R) celebrates his all-important goal with teammate Mathieu Valbuena during their international friendly against Spain at the Stade de France on Thursday.

'We have right core'

REUTERS, Paris

France's friendly win over Spain on Thursday showed their run to the World Cup quarterfinals in Brazil was no fluke and has strengthened coach Didier Deschamps's belief that he is building his Euro 2016 campaign around the right core.

'Les Bleus' were never threatened by Spain and prevailed 1-0 thanks to Loic Remy's second-half goal.

Deschamps made only one change from the side who started against eventual champions Germany in the World Cup quarterfinals, with Moussa Sissoko taking Yohan Cabaye's place in midfield.

Deschamps, who has two seasons of friendlies to get his team ready to host Euro 2016, said the performance against Spain was built on what they had achieved in Brazil.

"We managed to keep the mindset," said Deschamps. "Those who started were all at the World Cup. We have references, and we have gained experience in two years. It is not huge but it counts."

The French defence held firm throughout, with Rafael Varane and Mamadou Sakho easily containing the Spanish attacks.

Spain, who were defending their World Cup title in Brazil but were knocked out in the first round, failed to register a single shot on target in Paris.

In midfield, the power of Sissoko, Blaise Matuidi and Paul Pogba helped France gain the upper hand after the break while Mathieu Valbuena was in ebullient form behind the slightly disappointing Karim Benzema.

France looked lively going forward thanks to Sissoko and Valbuena although Antoine Griezmann's dull performance showed that Franck Ribery's shoes will be tough to fill.

Ribery retired from international football last month.

Deschamps hinted there would not be many changes in the future as he looks to further cement his squad's cohesion on and off the pitch.

"I am satisfied with these (players) and

we need to give them time," he said. "I've got a base to work on and the players are happy to be coming back."

"Maybe I'll change a few things when it will get busy during some Champions League periods but the ones I have now need to gain more collective experience."

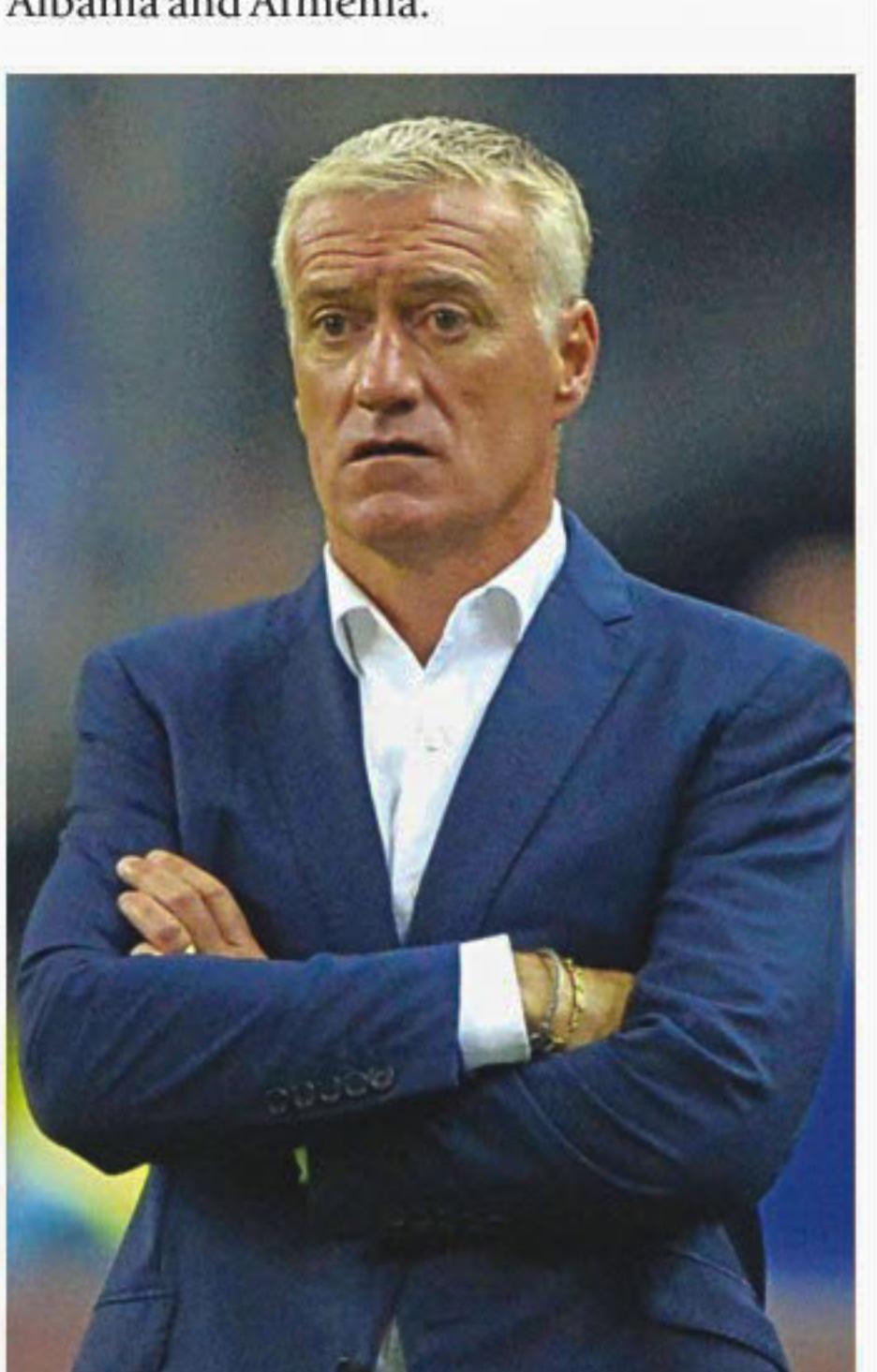
Looking ahead to the Euro 2016 finals, Deschamps said: "It's still far away but we had not beaten Spain in eight years. It's not nothing and it should give us more confidence."

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque, who is rebuilding his team after their shock World Cup exit, believes France will be a tough nut to crack on home soil in 2016.

"They are a very powerful, physical team," said Del Bosque.

"They will definitely be among the top contenders in two years."

France face Serbia away on Sunday and will play all Euro 2016 qualifying Group I teams in friendlies in the coming months. They will also take on Portugal, Denmark, Albania and Armenia.



DIDIER DESCHAMPS

 Peru stroll
past Iraq

REUTERS, Dubai

Iraq have work to do on their defensive tactics ahead of their Asian Cup campaign after the former champions twice conceded soft goals from corners in a 2-0 loss to Peru in Dubai on Thursday.

Jean Deza's whipped inswinger was deflected into his own net by Mustafa Nadhim in the 19th minute after Peru's Alexander Callens beat goalkeeper Jalal Hassan Hachim to the ball at the near post.

The South Americans doubled their advantage six minutes later when Callens' defensive partner Carlos Zambrano was left unmarked six yards out to powerfully head home another Deza corner.

Iraq had plenty of chances to cut the deficit in the second half but Mohannad Abdulraheem was guilty of aiming a close range header straight at Peru goalkeeper Pedro Galles when it seemed easier to score, with Farhan Shakor also seeing his turn and left foot shot well blocked by the stopper.

Iraq, who won the Asian Cup in fairytale fashion in 2007, will take on Syria in Dubai next month as they continue preparations for the next edition of the continental championship which takes place in Australia in January.

The Iraqis, quarterfinalists four years ago, have been drawn in Group D of the 2015 edition alongside defending champions Japan, Jordan and Palestine.

Flying start for Conte

REUTERS

Italy gave new coach Antonio Conte a flying start on Thursday, taking 10 minutes to equal their goal tally for the entire World Cup as they won a friendly in Bari against a depleted Netherlands, who were playing their first game under Guus Hiddink.

Mario Balotelli, dropped by Conte after the maverick striker's World Cup performance, drew barely-veiled criticism from his own team mates, was scarcely missed as the lively forward line of Ciro Immobile and Simone Zaza pestered the Dutch rearguard in a convincing 2-0 win.

Conte, however, will be wary of reading too much into the performance as the contest effectively ended in the 10th minute when the Dutch were reduced to 10 men and Italy scored their second goal.

Netherlands, semifinalists at the World Cup, were missing Arjen Robben, Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Rafael van der Vaart in the first match of 67-year-old Hiddink's second stint in charge.

The impressive 48,000 crowd in Bari had barely settled into their seats when Immobile latched onto a long ball over the Dutch defence, swept past goalkeeper Jasper Cillessen and scored into an empty net after only three minutes.

Daniele De Rossi converted a penalty seven minutes later after debutant forward Zaza was fouled by Bruno Martins Indi, who was harshly sent off, after the Dutch were caught out again.

"Apart from the result, I wanted to see a response from the boys and it was certainly positive in terms of effort, aggression and the football ideas we want to bring forward," Conte told Rai television.

"There are mature players here and also youngsters who can become great champions. There is a very long way to go, but as I always say, winning helps."

Italy were reeling from their first-round exit at the World Cup when they managed only two goals in the entire campaign, their worst tally since 1966.

Cesare Prandelli, whose contract ran until 2016, immediately quit and said that Italians had lost interest in their national team, who have won

four World Cups.

Determined to prove otherwise, the famously competitive Conte immediately installed the 3-5-2 system he used at Juventus, where he won three Serie A titles in as many years in charge.

Italy, dominating the match against off-colour opponents, could have added to their tally before halftime.

Cillessen stopped Zaza's side-footed effort after Immobile had set him up, then Zaza returned the compliment by chesting the ball down for Immobile who fired over the bar.

Robin van Persie sent a low drive across the face of goal in a rare Dutch attack early in the second half, but Italy were closer to a third when substitute Mattia Destro headed wide from Manuel Pasqual's inviting cross.

Italy never let up and were pressing deep into the Dutch half even in the last 10 minutes of the game.

"More than a special team, I had special men tonight," said Conte, whose team visit Norway for their opening Euro 2016 qualifier on Tuesday. "I am convinced that with hard work we can achieve good things."

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