

MAN UTD REVENUES FALL BUT £500M MILESTONE IN VIEW

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom: Manchester United's revenues fell by 8.8 per cent last season, but the club yesterday predicted record revenues of £500 million (\$776.4 million, 686 million euros) to £510 million for 2015-16.

United's failure to qualify for the lucrative Champions League saw revenues for the period 2014-15 fall by £38 million to £395.2 million, as revealed in their annual report, largely due to losses in gate receipts and broadcasting income. But with a new £750 million kit deal with Adidas having recently taken effect, United expect to become the first English club to break through the £500 million barrier over the current campaign.

"As we look to the new season, we are enthusiastic about our strong position, both on and off the pitch," United's executive vice chairman Ed Woodward said in a statement sent to investors.

"In recent weeks we have further strengthened our squad with an exciting mix of experience and youth, qualified for the group stage of the UEFA Champions League, and seen an impressive launch of our partnership with Adidas.

"Our record revenue and EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation) guidance for 2016 reflects the underlying strength of our business and our confidence in its continued growth."

United's 10-year partnership with Adidas, which began on September 1, dwarves many of their rivals' kit deals and the beginning of a new £5.14 billion Premier League TV rights deal in 2016-17 will swell their coffers further.

United failed to qualify for the Champions League in 2013-14, for the first time since 1995, after finishing seventh in the Premier League in the first season after the departure of legendary manager Alex Ferguson. But new manager Louis van Gaal led them to a fourth-place finish last season and they qualified for this season's tournament after beating Belgian side Club Brugge in a two-legged play-off in August.

Gross debt grows

Van Gaal has overseen an investment of over £250 million in new players since being appointed as the permanent successor to David Moyes, Ferguson's unsuccessful replacement, in July 2014. It was a splurge unprecedented in United's history and Woodward suggested there could be more to come. "Was 2015 a peak (in terms of transfer spending)? I think it's impossible to answer that question," he told investors during a conference call. "We have seen a large number of ins and outs in terms of the squad in the last couple of summer windows. We have previously guided on a more modest number in and out. — AFP

SWISS TO EXTRADITE FIGUEREDO TO US

GENEVA: Switzerland ruled yesterday that former FIFA vice president Eugenio Figueredo should be extradited to the US, the first suspect facing a forced transfer in the corruption case that has shaken world football. Figueredo, a Uruguayan national, has been charged by the US justice department with using his influence to solicit millions of dollars worth of bribes from sports marketing firms.

He was among the seven FIFA officials arrested in May at a luxury hotel in Zurich, following indictments issued by US Attorney General Loretta Lynch. One of those arrested, Jeffrey Webb of the Cayman Islands, agreed to extradition and was sent to the US in July, but the remaining six had challenged a transfer to American courts.

"All of the conditions for extradition are fulfilled," the Swiss justice ministry said in a statement, adding that Figueredo had five days to notify of his intent to appeal, and 30 days to formally file an appeal. Lynch met with her Swiss counterpart Michael Lauber this week in Zurich and said she was hopeful that all of those indicted by her office would be extradited. Switzerland is expected to rule on the remaining five extradition requests by the end of the month.

Lynch has said she has evidence of more than \$150 million worth of corruption at FIFA dating back to 1991, and on Monday made clear the her investigation has widened since May and that more people and "entities" are likely to face charges. She however declined to discuss whether FIFA President Sepp Blatter could ultimately be charged. The much-criticised 79-year-old Blatter has vehemently denied any wrongdoing in the scandal that has stained the world's most popular sport, even if some experts insist he must have been aware of the massive graft taking place under his watch. Blatter has said he will step down when his successor is chosen at an election in February.

Fake US citizen?

Figueredo may "have acquired US citizenship fraudulently by submitting forged medical reports in 2005 and 2006," the Swiss justice ministry said, noting that he could also be facing charges for document forgery. The US presented Swiss authorities with evidence that Figueredo repeatedly took bribes in exchange for awarding sports marketing contracts, specifically in connection with major South American football tournaments in 2015, 2016, 2019 and 2023.

Figueredo previously served as president of CONMEBOL, the South American football confederation. Lauber has launched his own investigation into the awarding of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups to Russia and Qatar, respectively, focusing on whether or not bribes were paid in the bidding process. — AFP



Former FIFA vice president Eugenio Figueredo



TEHRAN: Iranian women's football captain Niloofar Ardalan (C) speaking with her teammates during a practice session in Tehran. The Iranian women's football team will be minus its captain, Ardalan, at the Asian championship in Malaysia in September 2015 after her husband invoked his right under Islamic law to bar her from travelling. — AFP

HUSBAND BARS IRAN FOOTBALLER FROM ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

SPORTSCASTER INVOKES HIS RIGHT UNDER ISLAMIC LAW

TEHRAN: An Iranian women's football team will be minus its captain at the Asian championship in Malaysia next week after her husband invoked his right under Islamic law to bar her from travelling.

Mehdi Tutunchi, himself a sportscaster, said his wife Niloofar Ardalan could not lead out the national team at the September 21-26 championship in Nilai, because it coincided with their seven-year-old son's first day at school. Ardalan went public to plead her right to represent her country at the first women's tournament of futsal—a form of five-a-side football—organized by the Asian Football Confederation, in a case that captivated Iran's social media. She appealed for a change to the law, in force since the Islamic revolution of 1979, that bars women from leaving home, let alone the country, without the permission of their male guardian.

"I wish authorities would pass a law for

sportswomen so we can defend our rights in these circumstances," Ardalan told Iran's NASIM news agency.

"As a Muslim woman I wanted to raise the flag of my country, I wasn't going there for fun." Just as Iranian boys who have not completed their military service get temporary permits to attend sport events abroad, "something must be done for us women too," she said. Iranians took to Facebook to express sympathy for Ardalan and condemn her husband's decision. "To publicise this in Iran... This woman is very brave and selfless," Atefeh Amin wrote on a women's rights Facebook page.

Another user criticized the husband. "Mr. Tutunchi, you are depriving a human being of her first right to live her own life. Whatever the reason, you cannot do this," wrote a user going by the name Samaneh.

But as the outcry intensified, Ardalan

backed down, saying it was a private issue and that she was sorry that "anti-revolutionary media" had exploited her case.

"I'm a Muslim Iranian woman and my absence from these games is a personal and family matter," she told NASIM. "I only described my problem and asked for a solution for it," she said. "It's no one else's business." Unlike in some Muslim countries in the region, Iranian women enjoy the right to drive, vote and join a profession, and the majority of students enrolled in universities are female. However, women are required to wear the Islamic headscarf and are barred from certain activities, such as watching men play sports in stadiums, singing solo at concerts or riding a bicycle on the street. Moderate President Hassan Rouhani, who took office in 2013 on a platform of more social and political freedom, has three women vice presidents. — AFP