

NO 'WANNABE' FEMALE ZIDANES AT GIRONDINS OF BORDEAUX

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Summary

Comparing to around 80,000 male footballers in the French region of Aquitaine there are 2,372 registered girls players, but growing. Among the 73 football clubs which have both male and female teams, is not present the biggest and the richest: the Girondins of Bordeaux where Zinedine Zidane, now director of the Football Division at Real Madrid, exploded as a star. A paradox given the fact that the woman in charge of developing the female football in the region, Sylvie Rousseau, is working next door to the luxurious only for boys International Formation Centre of Girondins. Twenty years ago, both Zidane and Rousseau were internationals with France. But she had to ask for a leave at her factory to attend the games and had to pay for her own t-shirt. Now she is optimistic of the progress and believes Girondins will change its mind in two years time.

Article

Twenty years ago as Zinedine Zidane was exploding from 1992 to 1996 as a tremendous football player at Girondins of Bordeaux, which will lead him to be the best paid in the world, Sylvie Rousseau had to pay for her own t-shirt as a goalkeeper at ASJ Soyaux club, had to contribute with 50 francs to every time her team travelled and had to ask her chief at the factory of Tupperware for a leave whenever she had a match abroad. Both Zidane and Rousseau were playing at the 1st Division of the French League and both were internationals with France, but their careers and working conditions reflected the abyss between male and female football. "I had to pay for playing!", she says now with a smile.

We met Sylvie Rousseau by a fortunate and very eloquent twist. We have gone from the city centre of Bordeaux to the neighbouring village of Le Haillan to visit the headquarters of Girondins club, an impressive site with football training pitches for professionals, amateurs and the youngest wannabe



Zidanés of today who live here at the Formation Centre. The perfect green of the grounds surrounds the big château or palace of the administration offices and the press conferences hall. We wanted to know how this club, one of the most important in France, selects and forms the footballers from 13 to 18 years old who would be the stars of the senior team in a very near future. But as we are told that there's no one available today to show us the place, we have to leave following our footsteps. We reach an important fact by coming here anyway: the club who tours in the name of Bordeaux around Europe doesn't have any single female team in any category.

Outside the Girondins headquarters, we discover just next door in the road, wall to wall, the entrance to the Technical Centre of the League de Football D'Aquitaine, the region where Bordeaux is. Inside, next to a small garden, stands a modest building. And there she is: the woman at the office, Sylvie Rousseau, is a former player herself and now responsible for developing female football in Aquitaine following instructions of the French Federation.

She checks her statistics and explains that there are 2,372 registered girl player in the region, one hundred more than one year ago, but still far away from the 70,000 to 80,000 male footballers in the same area. There are 73 football clubs that have both male and female sections (and other two only for girls), but Rousseau regrets that among them is not the biggest, Girondins. A paradox given the fact that the woman who pushes for a change is working next door. "They know me, they know where I am, but they have not been interested so far in opening a

female section”, Rousseau says. But she believes that the great Bordeaux institution will follow the example of other main teams of the country as Lyon, Olympic of Marseille, Saint-Etienne or Montpellier and “in no more than two years” they will call her to ask for help to establish a female school. There are rumours, she adds, that the French Federation will impose this measure to every one, as it was its plan a few years ago. If Girondins doesn’t follow the trend “they will look ridiculous, because they will be the only one without female players”.

The investment will pay off, she points out giving the example of the Lyon club, whose women’s team, now in a tournament in Japan, has better results than their male counterparts. She is optimistic about the progress: female matches are being broadcasted in television (“some people like to watch them more than male matches”), the international players have now a status of high competition, and some of them are semi-professionals. The promotion of female football have lead them to great victories, as the World Championship for Under 17 last September or the 4th position at the London Olympics, triumphs which, at their turn, increases the popularity of the sport and attract new girls to the sport.

Rousseau is still involved in football and so is Zidane, at another galactic level. The artist is now the director of the Football Division at Spanish Real Madrid, which, by the way, doesn’t have a female team either. It’s eternal rival, Barcelona FC, does have it. Maybe Zidane could follow its example.

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EVANS Shirihuru is a volunteer presenter with Near FM. I work in a program called Culture Shots which broadcast every Mondays at 6.30pm for thirty minutes on radio and online. I interview people, edit and then present them. This program has become a success on our radio station. It was officially commissioned by the Minister of Justice in Ireland in July this year. I cover different topics that encourage diversity and integration. This program has different people from different backgrounds who work on it. I am a part time writer with Metro Eireaan newspaper. I recently took part in a pilot internship programme in the Irish Parliament which aims to encourage migrant communities in Ireland to get involved in politics.

