## Developing the "coolest" club in France and scrapping the classic "French model" is an integral part of Toulouse FC's growth plan

- Co-owners Yann and Penelope Ellouze of Brazilian Serie A club Sport Recife chairman of Toulouse FC in July last year after 12 years investment firm Redbird Capital Partners took over the club.
- Yann Ellouze explains why Toulouse FC's ownership structure underwent the top-to-and-tail reshuffle in April 2 The deal.
- When he started in his new role, Cornish wanted to understand the reason why Toulouse FC had been "stuck in the lower-mid table, and how did we end up being in a relegation scrap".
- The club has been remodelling the whole matchday experience for every fan in the stadium and has also overhauled how it has been offered something new.

**By Robert Kidd, sotsuga@influitech.com**

When Damien Comolli agreed to become chairman of Toulouse FC, the Ligue 1 club that had lost touch with their community.

In July 2020, US private investment firm Redbird Capital Partners announced it had taken a majority stake in the club. Co-owners Yann and Penelope Ellouze of Toulouse had just been relegated from Ligue 1 with a record low number of points. Four out of the previous seasons, the club had finished in relegation.

Comolli wanted to find out what had gone wrong. He spoke to as many people as possible, from the club's fans to its players and staff. He had "long conversations with the opening staff, coaches and technical staff, the medical staff, the physios, the players, the fans, everybody".

What became obvious was the fear that the connection between the fanbase and the football club was lost. The connection between the city as a whole entity and the football club was lost. Comolli kick-off The Pitch in an exclusive interview.

"And the first thing was to say, how do we reconnect?"

**A long-term project**

Comolli, who has been a director of football at Liverpool, Tottenham Hotspur and Newcastle United, joined Toulouse FC as a "consultant" in April 2021 and was approached by Redbird in January 2020 after leaving Newcastle. Redbird was searching for a European club to buy and had considered teams in Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Germany.

They studied around 70 clubs and videos. I think, 30, over the two years before. We started watching together. There were many opportunities to invest in French football because most of the clubs were on the edge." Comolli says.

"I was in a situation where I had other opportunities to work with the types of clubs I like working with before, that were in European competitions. I was in a situation where I was not looking for a job. I was not looking for a job. I had a much more long-term project."

Having agreed to become chairman, Comolli set his sights on an immediate return to Ligue 1. Toulouse finished third last season but missed out on promotion to the top flight after a play-off defeat to Lorient.

"It's between the club as it is and at the time of promotion and it [Toulouse] is relaxed", with relaxing promotion. That, Toulouse, is only the beginning of the plan.

"The comic-book hero I like a lot is Batman and I said to a message to all the staff, we want to come up and battle to Ligue 1 and then to Champions League," he says.

"And I usually add to that, the fourth biggest city in France should be somewhere between now and the eight in Ligue 1 every year. So that's the ambition."

**Strategic plan to increase revenues**

Off the pitch, Toulouse here a five-year strategic plan to grow revenues. Key to this was the creation of a new commercial department headed by former Ligue 1 CEO Jérôme Leakeh, a board with the club's minority shareholders, a club-wide "cultural revolution" and a new matchday experience for fans.

It is the latest revision since in the late Ukrainian region and Comolli carries to make it the "stronghold of French sport".

"We are in this unique situation where we are in the middle of the southwest France, Bordeaux is 30 minutes and Toulouse is 1 hour, Montpellier is 3.30, Marseille is 3.30, Paris is 3.30 and Barcelona is 3.30 by train."

"We can get a lot from that huge catchment area. We have access to a great talent pool of players, and we can develop a great fanbase on the entertainment side of the business as well."

**"So I'm a dreamer"**

The club are aiming to make 10 per cent of their week for corporate hospitality, which is "unbelievable" for a club of Toulouse's size. Ellouze, who has been involved in corporate and personal accounts professionals, rather than large-scale sports entertainment.

"So I'm a dreamer, I'm a realistic. I'm a realistic. I'm a dreamer and I make a good mix of both," he says. "I'm a dreamer in the business as I'm a dreamer in my life. I am with a friend and I will have a crystal ball before the game, a beer at halftime and I'm a dreamer of wine - and we do develop a great fanbase on the entertainment side."

"People don't want to sit in boxes anymore. They want to have corporate areas, big lounges where they can meet and sit with different people, and that's what we are trying to develop."

The Ellouzes "took off [international]", as he smarter ideas aimed at younger people, offering tickets and drinks with a beach-bar vibe and more.

**"Coolest club" in France**

Following a complete rebranding launched in October, Toulouse have introduced into the Modified Toulouse and a warm-tone known as the "coolest club" in France.

"We have to find a way which we are doing to connect with [young people] in a different way. But not as an entertainment business, as a football club," he says.

"My goal is first new ways of working internally is approaching. Because aligned with the local country, to approach the Toulouse FC's women's team, because it's the first, the best, the biggest, the most successful. We want to approach the drive of the coolest youth market.

"We are currently making more energy on the commercial sponsorship side to approach the youth market, the coolest, the hipsters."

"Think dance more impressive on social media when we signed the 35 year old Brazilian Jonathan David, who is a huge, huge, huge,