

BUSINESS OF FOOTBALL SUMMIT

The global gathering of leaders in football and finance

25-26 February 2026 | Event Insights



FT Live brings football into focus

The Business of Football Summit returned for its eighth edition to examine models for growth in a tougher investment climate, shaped by tighter regulation, rising costs and uncertain routes to profit. Investors, club and league executives, regulators, broadcasters and business leaders addressed critical topics including revenue diversification, the development of women's football, stadiums as core strategic assets, the 2026 World Cup and the growing influence of technology on the game. This report captures key themes and perspectives from event sessions.

Key takeaways

Media rights models must adapt as viewing habits change
Broadcast income remains football's financial bedrock, but fragmented audiences and digital viewing are reshaping its value. In some markets, domestic rights growth is slowing. The Premier League's direct-to-consumer move in Singapore signals a broader search for greater control over distribution and revenues.

International growth is piling pressure on players and calendars
An expanded Champions League, a larger World Cup and new tournaments are lifting global revenues faster than domestic leagues. In Italy and France, Champions League income is rising while domestic rights remain relatively flat. The result is a more congested calendar and higher player workload. Sustainability requires collective restraint and structural alignment.

Tighter regulation is reshaping club behaviour
From the Premier League's 85% rule to UEFA's cost controls in European competitions, spending is increasingly governed by formal oversight rather than internal discretion. This drives greater financial discipline and stability, but also less flexibility and higher barriers for challenger clubs seeking to close the gap.

Stadiums and infrastructure are becoming central to growth
Clubs are financing new venues as long-term infrastructure assets, separating recurring entertainment income from on-pitch performance. Hospitality, events and broader lifestyle revenues are moving from peripheral activities to core drivers of valuation.

Women's football is emerging as a strategic growth area
Investment is flowing with clear commercial objectives, and valuations reflect rising confidence. Clubs like Chelsea Women now have implied valuations into the hundreds of millions. With fewer legacy constraints, the women's game provides an opportunity to design more sustainable business models from the outset.



“ European football continues to grow, but it is growing unevenly and not without risk. ”

Andrea Traverso
Executive Director, Financial Sustainability and Research, UEFA



“ We are paid to create emotions, and we are also paid to make decisions without emotions. ”

Damien Comolli
CEO, Juventus



“ Every morning, you've got to get up and say, how are we growing this game? ”

Aki Manohar
CEO, Chelsea FC Women

From the stage to the page

Keynote spotlight: Richard Masters, CEO, Premier League

Richard Masters used his appearance to set out the Premier League's competitive position and its next commercial move, confirming the launch of Premier League Plus in Singapore for the 2026/27 season. The direct-to-consumer streaming service will be the first time the league has sold live matches straight to fans. Masters said the move gives the league greater flexibility, as international rights now generate more than half of its media income. He also defended current solidarity payments to the English Football League and the new 85 per cent squad cost ratio, arguing that the measures strike a balance between sustainability and ambition. At the same time, he acknowledged that the expansion of international competitions is putting more pressure on domestic schedules.



“ For the first time, we're going direct-to-consumer in Singapore. ”

Richard Masters CEO, Premier League



Panel spotlight: The transformation of the football club

The closing session of the event framed modern club leadership as a balance between emotion and strategy. Juventus CEO Damien Comolli spoke about the volatility of elite sport, from anger at refereeing to pride in a “glorious defeat”, arguing that alignment and data-led decisions help prevent those swings from shaping a season. Brighton's Paul Barber told the audience there is “no silver bullet” in the Premier League, only marginal gains achieved by growing revenue, controlling costs and recruiting well. Wrexham's Michael Williamson discussed the demands of scaling rapidly after sudden global exposure, while keeping progress rooted in community impact. Aston Villa Women's CEO Maggie Murphy emphasised autonomy and identity-building, stressing that the women's side is not simply a “female version” of the men's team.

“ If anyone in this room thinks they know what the exact, perfect governing structure is (for a women's team), they're kidding themselves ”

Maggie Murphy Managing Director, Aston Villa Women

“ I think the modern-day football CEO has to be a little bit of a tech CEO, media executive and at the same time an investment banker. ”

Michael Williamson CEO, Wrexham AFC

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Editorial insights

FT Live events are curated and chaired by Financial Times Group journalists who bring editorial rigour, independence and expertise to every discussion. We recommend the following articles which build on output from the summit.

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES

English Premier League to launch streaming service in international shake-up

Top European football clubs lost more than €1bn last year

Premier League clubs must help weaker rivals survive, says football regulator

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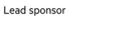
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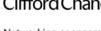
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