

Crédit Agricole pulls French World Cup ads

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France's World Cup campaign, crippled by dire performances on the pitch, internal strife and a players' strike, went from bad to worse when Crédit Agricole pulled an advertising campaign and sponsors demanded action by the country's football authorities.

The French bank said on Monday it had stopped early the advertising campaign, due to run until June 25, "in view of the current controversy surrounding the French national team".

The team's corporate sponsors have held conference calls to voice their anger at the players' refusal to train.

One person who took part in the conference calls said that the sponsors believed the situation was "unacceptable".

France is on the verge of elimination from the tournament, their 2-0 defeat to Mexico on Friday forcing tension between management and players into the open. The French team plays South Africa in its final group game tonight.

The crisis in French football – and the behaviour of the national team in South Africa – has triggered an avalanche of criticism from social commentators and politicians in France. Christine Lagarde, finance minister, said she was "appalled" by the players' behaviour.

It has highlighted, too, the sometimes fragile relationship between teams, players and their sponsors.

The team's management sent home striker Nicolas Anelka for abusing coach Raymond Domenech during half time in the Mexico game, a move that led to the team's refusal to train on Sunday in protest. Jean-Louis Valentin resigned as team director in disgust at the players' behaviour.

The French debacle has led to sponsors working collectively to demand immediate action by the French Football Federation.

They believe that, while the players' behaviour in South Africa was reprehensible, the FFF is dysfunctional and ignored warning signs about tensions between Mr Domenech and the team.

Sponsorship and TV rights of the French national team are worth €70m (\$86.3m), according to Les Echos. The team sponsors are retailer Carrefour, utility provider GDF Suez, Crédit Agricole, SFR, the telecoms company, and sport goods maker Adidas.

Fonte: Financial Times, London, June 17th 2010, Companies, online.