

Spain Player Files Criminal Complaint Over Soccer Chief's Kiss

Jennifer Hermoso has said the kiss from Luis Rubiales, head of the Spanish soccer federation, at the women's World Cup was not consensual. The scandal has grown into a reckoning over sexism.

By Emma Bubola and Rachel Chaundler

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The Spanish soccer star Jennifer Hermoso has filed a sexual assault complaint against Luis Rubiales, the head of the country's soccer federation, after he gave her an unsolicited kiss in the wake of her team's World Cup victory in Australia last month, prosecutors said on Wednesday.

The criminal complaint by Ms. Hermoso clears the way for prosecutors to open a case against Mr. Rubiales, who has been the subject of enormous criticism ever since the kiss during a medal ceremony following Spain's victory over England in the World Cup final on Aug. 20.

Prosecutors in Spain opened an initial investigation last Thursday into whether Mr. Rubiales could be charged with committing sexual assault and invited Ms. Hermoso, who had said that the kiss made her feel "vulnerable" and a "victim of an attack," to formalize a complaint within 15 days. In Spain, sexual assault is a crime punishable with one to four years in prison.

"It was a necessary step to begin the judicial process," said Mar Hedo, a spokeswoman for the prosecutor's office. She said the first phase of the case would come in a few days.

There was no immediate comment from Mr. Rubiales.

Mr. Rubiales has defended his conduct and said that Ms. Hermoso had initiated the exchange, but she has maintained that she did not consent to the kiss. Mr. Rubiales has also resisted calls to resign from the Spanish soccer federation.

After initially offering an apology the day after World Cup final, he reversed course, and amid rumors that his resignation was imminent, he said that Ms. Hermoso had "moved me close to her body" during their encounter onstage. He accused his critics of targeting him for "social assassination" and declared that he would not step down.

The kiss provoked a widespread debate over sexism in sport, most notably in Spain, which is battling a deep-rooted, while declining, culture of machismo. Some commentators have described it as Spain's #MeToo moment.

The fate of Mr. Rubiales, who has been suspended from all soccer-related activity for 90 days by FIFA, the sport's world governing body, remains in the balance, but another prominent male figure in women's soccer in Spain has already lost his job.

Jorge Vilda, the coach of the women's national team, was fired by the Spanish soccer federation on Tuesday, after months of complaints from players who accused him of outdated methods and controlling behavior.

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