

# ***Spanish Soccer Official Apologizes, Sort of, for Kissing World Cup Winner***

“Probably I made a mistake,” Luis Rubiales, the Spanish soccer federation chief, said after grabbing Jennifer Hermoso and planting a kiss full on her mouth, igniting howls of outrage on social media.

A day after drawing outrage by grabbing and forcefully kissing the Spanish forward Jennifer Hermoso on the lips during the Women’s World Cup medals ceremony, Spain’s soccer federation chief issued something of an apology.

“I have to apologize,” the official, Luis Rubiales, said in a video broadcast by the federation on Monday afternoon. “Probably I made a mistake.”

The kiss was delivered in Sydney, Australia, only a few feet from where the Spanish queen, Letizia, was standing onstage as she congratulated the women’s team for beating England, 1-0, to capture its first World Cup trophy on Sunday.

Spaniards reacted with confusion and disgust on social media. Many saw it as evidence of a callous disregard for Ms. Hermoso and, more broadly, lingering sexism in soccer.

The episode is the latest in a string of incidents that have plagued the women’s national team in recent months. Last year, 15 star players walked out in protest, accusing the coach, Jorge Vilda, of outdated training methods and controlling behavior.

But the soccer federation backed Mr. Vilda, and only three of the rebel players were readmitted to the team.

At first, Mr. Rubiales responded to the latest controversy with flippancy, brushing off his critics as “losers” in a late-night interview with the Cadena Cope radio station before boarding a flight back to Spain from Australia.

“We shouldn’t pay attention to idiots and stupid people,” he said then, claiming that the kiss had been just a “peck between two friends celebrating something.”

But by the time his long-haul flight landed in Spain on Monday morning, condemnation of his behavior was widespread in Spain.

Adding his voice to the chorus of complaints, the minister of culture and sport, Miquel Iceta, called for an explanation from the soccer chief, pointing out that it was unacceptable to congratulate soccer players by kissing them on the lips.

Other prominent politicians demanded Mr. Rubiales’s resignation. The minister of equality, Irene Montero, accused Mr. Rubiales on X, the social media platform formerly

known as Twitter, of sexual violence.

Mr. Rubiales then changed his tune. “There was no bad intention by either party,” he said on Monday. “We saw it as natural,” he added, apparently referring to Ms. Hermoso. “But it has caused a commotion and people are offended, so I must apologize.”

Attempts to reach Mr. Rubiales by phone and email were not successful on Sunday and Monday.

As for Ms. Hermoso, she seemed to have been taken by surprise by the kiss on Sunday, and expressed her distaste in a post-match video, saying, “Hey, but I didn’t like that!”

Later, in a statement released by the Spanish soccer federation, she is quoted as saying, “It was a totally spontaneous mutual gesture because of the huge joy of winning a World Cup.”