

# *Players in Spain's Women's League Call Off Strike*

The breakthrough in the labor dispute, which has delayed the start of the season and has added to a turbulent period in Spanish soccer, was an agreement over minimum pay.

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Reporting from Zaragoza, Spain

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Players in Spain's women's soccer league have called off a strike that delayed the opening of the season after reaching an agreement with the league over minimum salaries, a rare moment of harmony in what has been an acrimonious period in Spanish soccer.

The agreement, confirmed early Thursday, would raise the minimum salary for players in the league to 21,000 euros, or about \$22,500, from 16,000 euros this season, a significant increase but still far short of what their male counterparts make.

The minimum is scheduled to rise to €23,500 for the 2025-2026 season, with the potential for an even higher benchmark "if enough profits are obtained from commercial assets," such as sponsorship, according to a statement from the unions representing the players.

Spanish soccer is in the midst of a turbulent moment, touched off by an unwanted kiss by Luis Rubiales, the nation's top soccer official at the time, on Jennifer Hermoso, one of the national team's top players. The episode occurred last month after Spain's 1-0 victory over England in the Women's World Cup final in Sydney, Australia.

The furor over Mr. Rubiales's conduct — both the kiss and what came after — has put a spotlight on the various inequities and accusations of misconduct in the Spanish game, with claims of deeply rooted discrimination and chauvinism. The episode has been described in some quarters as Spain's #MeToo moment.

The negotiations were "tough, intense and long," Beatriz Álvarez, the president of Spain's fledgling professional women's league, said during a late-night news conference in announcing the agreement that clears the way for the season to begin on Friday, after matches last weekend were called off.

Despite the raise, female players will still make far less than male players in Spain's top division. According to A.F.E., the main soccer union in Spain, the minimum salary for first-division male players is 180,000 euros, although Ms. Alvarez said that as the women's league increases its income, "the conditions of the players will improve."

The unions, in their statement, made clear that they were looking for more than just increased compensation, highlighting the need to continue to work not just for higher pay but also for better maternity conditions and “harassment protocol.”

The A.F.E.’s chief lawyer, María José López, who was involved in the negotiations, said that “types of behavior that could be considered harassment, such as a pat on the backside or a kiss, need to be redefined, and sanctioning procedures made more agile.”

That could be interpreted as a reference to Mr. Rubiales, who is expected to appear in court on Friday in connection with a criminal case that could lead to sexual assault charges, and to the developments surrounding him since the World Cup victory that have deeply unsettled Spanish soccer.

After he refused to step down in response to widespread criticism of his kiss, current members of the national team and dozens of other players said they would not take the field for Spain unless significant changes were made in the leadership of the Spanish soccer federation.

Mr. Rubiales eventually resigned on Sunday, and Jorge Vilda, who was accused by players last year of controlling behavior, was fired as the team’s coach this month.

The team is scheduled to play its first match since the World Cup next week, against Sweden, and it is not clear whether the players will consider the departures of Mr. Rubiales and Mr. Vilda to be enough to bring them back into the fold.

The answer to that question may come on Friday, when Montse Tomé, who was chosen to replace Mr. Vilda and is the first woman to lead the national team, will name her roster for the match next week.