



Short Case 58

STAKEHOLDER GROUPS IN THE SPANISH WOMEN'S FOOTBALL TEAM

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First stage: August 2022-March 2023

In August 2022, following the elimination of the Spanish Women's Football Team from the Eurocup, a majority of the players believed there were various structural problems affecting the team, hindering a better performance. The team captains, Irene Paredes, Jennifer Hermoso, and Patri Guijarro, raised with the coach Jorge Vilda the need for a change in methods, highlighting that the coach was too authoritarian. This message was also conveyed to the President of the Royal Spanish Football Federation, Luis Rubiales, as well as to the fans and society as a whole, through a press conference held on September 1, 2022.

The coach himself expressed his discomfort with this demand in a separate press conference from the players. The Federation's reaction was to support the coach and ignore the demands of the captains. In response, 15 players, later referred to as "the group of 15", issued a statement expressing their desire not to be called up for the matches the team had to play in October. Media reports, shared by the Federation, indicated that the real objective of the players was the dismissal of the coach and his team.

None of the 15 signatories of the statement, as well as others who expressed their support for it, were called up for the October matches. However, despite the number of absences, the Spanish team managed to defeat the United States, the #1 team in the world rankings at that time. Vilda received jeers from the fans during the match, and some internationally renowned players, such as Megan Rapinoe (USA), explicitly supported the players' demands. Vilda publicly stated that he did not wish such pressures upon anyone, as his image was experiencing significant deterioration in the public eye. However, the coach remained in his position, supported by the Federation.

Second stage: March 2023-August 2023

The absence of international matches silenced the issue until March 2023. Reports emerged of efforts to alleviate tensions between different parties. Thus, in March 2023, Irene Paredes, one of the 15 and spokesperson as captain, attended the team's call-up for two friendly matches. With the World Cup coming up in August, pressure from some sponsors made some players change their minds, and three were included in the World Cup squad. Some publicly stated that the Federation's actions were positive enough. However, some available players were not called up, as the coach favored those who had replaced them.

Third stage: August 2023-May 2024

The Spanish Women's Football Team won the World Cup in August 2023. In a globally televised event, the Federation President publicly kissed Jennifer Hermoso against her will. In response to criticism from all sectors (political, sports, society), and particularly from the players themselves, Rubiales initially reacted without showing any remorse. However, when criticism intensified, he made statements indicating a need for reflection.





Various Spanish Government members, including the President, publicly condemned Rubiales's attitude, calling for his resignation. Unions, including the Spanish Footballers' Association, demanded his resignation, threatening with the activation of sanctions under Sports Law if not complied with. The F League, Spain's top-tier women's football category, called for action from the Superior Council of Sports, the Government body regulating sports activities in Spain.

Meanwhile Rubiales, personally and through other Federation executives, attempted to portray Hermoso's public kiss as consensual. Faced with the player's refusal, as well as the rest of the team's lack of support for this claim, the Federation issued a statement indicating that the player had accepted the apology. Hermoso referred to her union, Futpro, which in turn requested disciplinary action against Rubiales.

On August 25, 2023, during a press conference where he was expected to announce his resignation, Rubiales stated that he would not resign. This led to increased protests, with the majority of first and second division football clubs and prominent figures in the field, such as Iker Casillas, Isco Alarcón, or Borja Iglesias, publicly supporting Hermoso. Part of the Spanish Football Federation's board resigned. The government sued Rubiales before the Sports Administrative Court, and 81 players refused to be called up by the team until various changes were made in the Federation, including the departure of Rubiales, much of his management team, and coach Jorge Vilda.

The International Football Federation, FIFA, of which Rubiales was Vice President, took disciplinary action, suspending him from his duties for ninety days, ultimately determining his disqualification on October 30, 2023. Rubiales resigned on September 10, 2023, and on September 12, legal proceedings began in this case, in which several executives were accused of coercion against Jennifer Hermoso. After Rubiales's downfall, Secretary-General of the Federation Andreu Camps; coach Jorge Vilda; Pablo García-Cuervo, communication director; and Miguel García Caba, director of integrity, were dismissed or fired.

The Federation appointed Montse Tomé, who had been Vilda's assistant until then, as coach. The players made it clear they were unwilling to work with her. The urgency of participation in the Nations League, a qualifier for the 2024 Paris Olympics, led the new coach to call up all players she deemed suitable in Oliva (Valencia), including some who did not wish to be called up. After various meetings between government representatives (Superior Council of Sports), the Federation, and the players, it was decided that those who did not wish to play could leave the call-up, which Mapi León and Patri Guijarro did. Although apparently an agreement was reached that included Tomé's departure from the team, the results, the dismissals of various Federation executives, and a certain relaxation of positions allowed her to remain at the helm of the team, contributing to its qualification for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Question: Conduct an analysis of the situation of the Spanish Women's Football Team using the stakeholder map and its evolution over time.

<https://cadenaser.com/nacional/2022/09/01/vilda-y-las-capitanas-de-la-seleccion-comparecen-separados-tengo-un-sentimiento-de-decepcion-cadena-ser/>

<https://www.elmundo.es/deportes/futbol/futbol-femenino/2023/03/31/6426b64dfdddf18208b45bc.html>

