

Winds of rebellion blow through women's football ahead of World Cup



Captain Wendie Renard led revolt in France led to sacking of national team coach Corinne Diacre.

● AP

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In a Women's World Cup year, players from several national teams have spoken out to condemn managerial methods, demand better conditions or call for equal pay, and the sacrifices are paying off with four months to go until the showpiece in Australia and New Zealand, AFP reported.

In France, a revolt by some of the country's top players, led by captain Wendie Renard, led to the sacking of coach Corinne Diacre on Thursday.

Canada's national team threatened to go on strike in a row over pay, funding and contractual issues.

Meanwhile, 15 members of Spain's squad decided in September to withdraw from international duty,

calling for major changes, including the departure of coach Jorge Vilda. He remains at the helm.

Jonas Baer-Hoffmann, the general secretary of global footballers' union FIFPro, said in many cases the leadership of the sport was lagging behind the aspirations and achievements of women players.

"Whether it is the players' own conditions and economic support, the coaching environments, the lack of professional structures in their federations and leagues -- they don't match what is asked and delivered by the players on the pitch and to grow the sport," he told AFP.

"No player should have to sacrifice a part of their career to achieve what they are asking for and it shows how unresponsive the leadership in many organisations still is to truly commit to women's football."

Stars to miss World Cup?

Players from France, Canada and Spain are not the first to agitate for change.

Ada Hegerberg, the first-ever winner of the women's Ballon d'Or, withdrew from the international scene in 2017, citing concerns over the inequality of treatment given to men's and women's teams by the Norwegian federation.

The United States team, led by superstars Carli Lloyd, Megan Rapinoe and Alex Morgan, filed a complaint against the U.S. Soccer Federation alleging wage discrimination.

Their fight eventually led to a landmark collective bargaining deal last year which would mean the US men's and women's teams evenly sharing World Cup prize money paid by FIFA. Morgan offered her support to the French rebels on social media.

"You know it's serious when the most capped player/skipper can't support or play" for France, said Morgan, an ex-teammate of Renard at French side Lyon.

It is striking to see so many rebellions taking place so close to the World Cup, which kicks off on July 20.

The possibility that some of the biggest stars will not feature in Australia and New Zealand is "a very real threat", according to Baer-Hoffmann.

"We hope that those with the abilities to change those circumstances don't feel like this is a power play to fight over but see that the protest comes from a place of a genuine desire to improve the game, make it accessible for all."

Spanish B team

In Canada and in France, the rebels have won out.

Diacre was dismissed on Thursday, while Canada Soccer president Nick Bon-

tis recently resigned, admitting change was needed at the top of the organization.

Canada Soccer has since proposed an equal pay deal that it said will make their women's team the second best-paid in the world.

Yet both disputes have left a mark, with Renard speaking of concerns for her mental health.

Christine Sinclair, Canada's all-time top scorer, told a government hearing that she had "never been more insulted than I was by Canada Soccer's own president last year, as we met with him to discuss our concerns."

In Spain, however, there is no sign of a return for the players who quit after the Spanish Football Federation backed Vilda.

He has therefore effectively called up a B team for recent games, although top scorer Jennifer Hermoso has made a comeback.



Amir Ghalenoei, Team Melli's new head coach

● tarafdari.com

Iran appoints Amir Ghalenoei as Team Melli head coach Kick-and-rush era is back!



Saeed Azimi
Staff writer

In a move that is considered going 16-years back, Iran's football federation appointed Amir Ghalenoei, a veteran Iranian coach in his 60s as Team Melli's head coach. Following Carlos Queiroz's

departure from the Iranian national football team, Mehdi Taj, Head of Iran's Football Federation (FFIRI) had promised Team Melli fans that the new head coach will be appointed by March 12.

He lived up to his promise, but his choice has sparked outrage among diehard Team Melli aficionados. Known for his tactical backwardness and his stylish kick-and-rush tactic -- a style of play mainly based on long balls, with little tactical maneuvers --, Ghalenoei has failed to gain any domestic championship titles since 2013, let alone any regional or international title. His appointment as Team Melli's top coach, therefore, came as a shock to many and has concerned fans ahead of the AFC Asian Cup 2023.

While some call Ghalenoei an "architect" of Iranian

football players, the labeling is simply not true. His recipe for success is the same. The players he employs have common characteristics: a strong sense of loyalty to him, familiarity with kick-and-rush tactic, and an aptitude for time wasting when his teams are ahead.

We don't expect much from Ghalenoei, but Taj is solely responsible for his choice of Team Melli head coach. Taj has repeatedly blamed the sanctions against Iran as an obstacle to appointing big international names. Yet, this time, he played a dirty game with the minds of Team Melli fans. He first leaked big names such as Vincenzo Montella, former AC Milan and AS Roma head coach, Andrea Stramaccioni, former Inter Milan head

coach, and Felix Sanchez, former Qatari head coach. Yet, hiring a big name for Team Melli was not Taj's plan after all. He had always intended to hire a domestic coach, and what he did was simply playing with the feelings of the Iranians.

Media reports say that Ghalenoei has asked for a foreign trainer, goalkeeping coach, and a fitness coach, as well as two Iranian assistants. This doesn't change the fact that he is a stubborn man and is incapable of any change. His club in Iran's Premier League (IPL), Gol Gohar Sirjan F.C. is now standing at the fifth rank, despite the exorbitant amount of money he spent on signing big names.

I cannot predict a bright future for the Iranian football team, not with this choice.

NBA: Curry's late heroics lift Warriors over Giannis-less Bucks



Stephen Curry (right) scored 22 of his 36 points in the fourth quarter and overtime to lead his side to a 125-116 win.

● AFP

Stephen Curry rallied the defending National Basketball Association (NBA) champions the Golden State Warriors on Saturday to deliver a 125-116 overtime victory over the Milwaukee Bucks which his coach called "championship stuff".

The two-time NBA Most Valuable Player scored 22 of his 36 points in the fourth quarter and overtime, with key three-pointers and a timely block helping Golden State stretch their home winning streak to seven games, The Strait Times reported.

"We feed off our crowd's energy," Curry said.

"Whatever it is in terms of our focus and energy and effort, it's giving us a chance no matter what the score is down the stretch."

While his scoring burst was impressive, it was his late block on Jrue Holiday that captured the attention.

Shortly after Curry scored a game-leveling three-pointer with 19 seconds in regulation time, he denied the Bucks' two-time All-Star guard to send the game into overtime.

"When you (make) a couple of big shots down the stretch and then find yourself in a position to make a play on the other side, I think that gives everybody a good boost," Curry was quoted by ESPN as saying. "I think I got more compliments on that in the locker room than any shot I made tonight."

It definitely got 2017 NBA Defensive Player of the Year Draymond Green purring.

He said: "He came out of nowhere. Jrue had a straight line drive to the rim... It was great to see him use the rules of verticality and get that block." His coach Steve Kerr added: "Steph was incredible, and he did it against one of the great defenders in Jrue Holiday."

"It's amazing watching those two guys battle. Steph is fearless. It doesn't matter if there is a slow start or if he hasn't had much going, he can ignite at anytime."

The Bucks, playing without two-time NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo due to his sore right hand, saw their nine-game road winning streak snapped and their NBA-best record fall to 48-19.

Milwaukee led by five in the final minute, but Curry sank a three-pointer and made a fast break layup to tie the game.