

Hermoso 'received threats' after Rubiales controversy



JOHN COWPLAND/AP

THE GUARDIAN – Jenni Hermoso has said she received threats amid the controversy after the then Spanish Football Federation president Luis Rubiales kissed her on the lips following their World Cup final win.

Hermoso said the kiss was not consensual and Rubiales was subsequently banned for three years by FIFA.

But the media storm continued for several weeks, with Hermoso dragged into a spotlight she did not choose when she should have been celebrating the biggest achievement of a career which has also yielded seven league titles and one Champions League crown.

Hermoso was left out of Spain's squad in September, with new coach Montse Tomé saying she wanted to protect the 33-year-old, but returned last month and scored a late winner in a 1-0 victory over Italy in the Women's Nations League.

Now Hermoso, who plays for CF Pachuca in Mexico, has opened up on the toll the controversy took on her in an interview with GQSpain. "These weeks have been very difficult," Hermoso said. "Having to tell it over and over again was hurting me a lot. But I know I had to let it go somehow. I continue working on it with the help of my psychologist, who I have been with for many years."

"For me, mental health is as important as daily training, like the hours I have to sleep to be able to go out on the field. Thanks to her I feel strong and I'm not shattered or thinking about not wanting to play football anymore. I have not lost my enthusiasm." She added: "I've had to assume the consequences of an act that I did not provoke, that I had not chosen or premeditated. I have received threats, and that is something you never get used to."

Rubiales has maintained that the kiss was consensual but his actions led to the creation of the hashtag #SeAcabo, meaning 'It's over', as further demands were made for fundamental change in the game.

"Fortunately or unfortunately, there is this story, but I am going to learn to take advantage of it positively to fight for what I believe is good for society. The #SeAcabo movement must bring a new era," Hermoso said.

AFC Champions League:

Sepahan runs riot against AGMK; Nassaji crashes out

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League club Sepahan scored nine goals and had three chalked off by VAR to demolish Uzbekistan's AGMK 9-0 on matchday four of the AFC Champions League at Tehran's Azadi Stadium, boosting hopes of a place in the knockout phase.

Farshad Ahmadzadeh's eighth-minute strike was the difference between the two teams at the break, before eight goals inside 34 minutes sealed the emphatic victory for the Iranian top-flight side.

Mohammad-Javad Hosseini and Issa Aleksir scored a brace apiece, with Reza Asadi, Mohammad Qorbani, Ramin Rezaeian, and Shahriar Moghanlou also finding the net as Sepahan moved up to second in Group C with seven points – thanks to a superior goal difference over Iraqi side Air Force Club, which stunned group leader Al Ittihad by a 2-0 home victory earlier on Monday.

The scoreline marked the third highest margin in the history of the Asian elite clubs competition, while it saw the Iranian club bounce back from Thursday's AFC ruling in style. The Asian football governing body's Disciplinary and Ethics Committee handed Sepahan a 3-0 loss against Saudi side Al Ittihad after their match was called off minutes before the kickoff



Sepahan players celebrate a goal during a 9-0 victory over AGMK in the AFC Champions League at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on Nov. 6, 2023.

MARZIEH SOLEIMANI/IRNA

at Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium on October 3. Sepahan was also fined \$200,000 and banned from playing in the home venue for three matches, due to the Iranian side "displaying a military and/or political statue in the area surrounding the field," which was labeled as the club's

failure to "act in a politically neutral manner." Sepahan will host Air Force Club in three weeks before playing away to Al Ittihad in the final round of the group fixtures on December 4.

Elsewhere, Nassaji Mazandaran's quest for a place in the round of 16 came

to an end with two games to spare in Group D, after a 3-1 home defeat against Uzbekistan's Navbahor. Igor Golban put the visiting side in front with six minutes into the contest at the Azadi Stadium, with Oston O'runov getting on the scoresheet midway through the first half to

give Navbahor a two-goal cushion at half time. O'runov all but secured the maximum points for his team with his second of the day right after the interval. Mohammadreza Azadi's close-range header in the 68th minute proved too little too late as Seyyed Mahdi Rahmati's men suf-

fered a sixth loss in seven outings across all competitions.

Nassaji remained on three points – seven adrift of Al Hilal and Navbahor – and will play for its reputation in the next two dead-rubbers – at home against India's Mumbai City and the final-day visit to Al Hilal.



HENRY ROMERO/REUTERS

Swiatek avoids rankings distraction, focuses on the 'right stuff'

REUTERS – WTA Finals champion Iga Swiatek said the poor playing conditions in Cancun forced her to focus on her game instead of being distracted by the prospect of regaining the world number one ranking. The four-time Grand Slam champion swept aside Jessica Pegula 6-1 6-0 to claim her first WTA Finals title, and return to the top of the rankings after being deposed by Aryna Sabalenka in September.

The WTA conceded this year's edition of the Finals was "not a perfect

event", with the court condition and stormy weather among the issues affecting players. Sabalenka said she did not feel safe playing on the court.

"The conditions that were kind of tricky also helped me to just, you know, focus on adjust my footwork, my shots ... that kept me busy from thinking about all of that," Swiatek told reporters of the number one ranking on Monday.

"So I think today was ... just being narrow with your head, only think-

ing about the right stuff."

The 22-year-old Pole said she had been distracted by the ranking race at other tournaments and it had affected her performance.

"It played (in my mind) a lot in the US Open and the tournaments before but I kind of learned my lesson," she said.

"This time I didn't want it to have an impact on me ... it's hard not to think about stuff like that but actually when I went on court I knew that I had to focus on different things."

Knicks top Clippers to spoil Harden's debut

REUTERS – RJ Barrett, returning from a two-game absence caused by a sore left knee, scored 11 points during a fourth-quarter surge as the host New York Knicks broke open a tie game and cruised to a 111-97 win over the Los Angeles Clippers on Monday. The Knicks outscored the Clippers 35-21 in the fourth quarter and 69-51 in the second

half, spoiling the debut of new Los Angeles acquisition James Harden. Barrett finished with 26 points while Julius Randle posted a season-high 27 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for the Knicks, who won at home for the first time in three tries this season. Mitchell Robinson (13 points, 15 rebounds) also had a double-double for New York. Kawhi Leonard scored

18 points while Harden finished with 17 points in 31-plus minutes in his first action since the Philadelphia 76ers dealt him to the Clippers on Oct. 31. Tyler Herro finished with 22 points despite going just 2-for-10 from 3-point range on a night when the Heat collectively went just 12-for-37 from beyond the arc. The Miami defense forced Los Ange-

les into an even worse shooting performance from deep, however, limiting the Lakers to 8 of 26 from long range. LeBron James scored seven of his game-high 30 points in a 1:19 stretch late in the fourth quarter, helping trim a 10-point Miami lead to one. His last points of the burst, a three-point play with 2:39 remaining, capped the game's scoring.



Knicks guard RJ Barrett (9) shoots during an NBA victory over the Clippers at Madison Square Garden, New York, NY, US, on Nov. 6, 2023.

JOHN MUNSON/AP