

## ‘Leaving a Terrific Legacy’: USWNT, U.S. Soccer Federation Settle Equal Pay Lawsuit for \$24M

The U.S. Soccer Federation and members of the women’s national soccer team who sued for gender discrimination reached a \$24 million settlement Tuesday.

By Marianna Wharry

After more than half a decade, the U.S. Women’s National Soccer Team’s fight over equal pay ended Tuesday with a multimillion-dollar payment to players and the organization’s promise to equalize pay between the men’s and women’s national teams.

The U.S. Soccer Federation and members of the team who sued for gender discrimination reached a \$24 million settlement.

The agreement initiates a \$22 million lump-sum payment to the class, which includes 61 women, with an additional \$2 million placed into a fund for post-career goals and charitable efforts related to women’s and girls’ soccer. Each player will be able to apply for up to \$50,000 from the fund. The agreement also includes back pay compensation.

The new deal is contingent on the negotiation of a new collective bargaining agreement for the players

on the USWNT. Once negotiated, the agreement between the Federation and the players will resolve the ongoing litigation, according to a [statement](#) from U.S. Soccer and the USWNT players.

Claims related to working conditions that had been filed as part of this litigation were previously resolved in December 2020. Additionally, the Federation committed to providing an equal rate of pay going forward for the women’s and men’s national teams in all friendlies and tournaments, including the World Cup. The details for this portion of the agreement will be established with the new collective bargaining agreement between the U.S. Soccer Federation and the USWNT.

The case is currently on appeal before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, and the parties have jointly [requested](#) that the appeal be held in abeyance and the



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U.S. Women’s National Soccer Team celebrates scoring a goal during a friendly game against Mexico as preparation for 2019 Women’s World Cup in Harrison, New Jersey.

oral argument scheduled for March 7 be removed from the calendar.

The litigation began in March 2019 when 28 players from the USWNT sued the U.S. Soccer Federation alleging pay discrepancies between female and male players, despite the women’s team outperforming the men on the field.

Tensions increased between the players and the organization as the USWNT competed in the 2019 FIFA

Women's World Cup and secured its second consecutive championship.

The president of the Federation on March 11, 2020, [announced](#) it was bringing on Latham & Watkins after the group and its lawyers at Seyfarth Shaw argued in federal court that the USWNT has less "skill" than the men's team.

The players were dealt a blow when a federal judge dismissed the women's team's argument over receiving lower pay in comparison with the U.S. men's team in May 2020. In April, the players filed an appeal on the equal pay claims, which resulted in Tuesday's settlement.

Latham & Watkins attorney Jamie Wine said the firm's longstanding relationship with U.S. Soccer led to her and her team's involvement in the litigation after the Federation removed prior counsel. The goal from the outset has been to resolve the litigation so the players and Federation can continue to work productively together to advance women's soccer, and she said the Federation is pleased with the settlement.

"It's just much better for the Federation and the WNT players to take this step forward together and really shift the focus away from litigation

and put it where it should be, which is growing the sport for women and girls around the country," Wine said. "That's really why the Federation and the WNT players are aligned, and that's where we all wanted our efforts to be."

Attorney Nicole A. Saharsky, of Mayer Brown in Washington D.C., assisted the players in the proceedings, and said they were always open to negotiate with U.S. Soccer, but it needed to be something that would acknowledge the disparities in the past before the players could join the Federation to move forward.

The players are "very happy" to reach the resolution, according to Saharsky, and the settlement itself marks a historic moment since the U.S. Women's National Team was founded in 1985.

"The players have always thought that this wasn't just a lawsuit for themselves, [and] that they really needed to represent other women who were on the team, and other women and girls in sports to make sure they're treated fairly," Saharsky said. "[The players] feel like they're leaving a terrific legacy."

The next step in ratifying the agreement will require the district

court's approval of the settlement and the collective bargaining agreement being backed by the players' union, the U.S. Women's National Team Players Association, and the Federation.

Wine said the agreement's contingency on the CBA indicates that both the players and the Federation will be on the same page going forward.

In a statement to Law.com, the players' union noted the success of the settlement agreement, but it also said work regarding the CBA negotiations are ongoing.

"From the formation of the team in 1985 through the present, the players on the Women's National Team—despite success on the field with few parallels in any sport—have always been paid far less than the men," the USWNTPA wrote. "Despite this, they achieved great success on the field, and did so with fewer resources than the men's team, while spending thousands of hours deeply involved in the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements and the lawsuit that finally forced the Federation to acknowledge the necessity for equal pay. The settlement announced today is an important step in righting the many wrongs of the past."