

Soccer Deals Align Men's, Women's Pay

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The United States Soccer Federation reached landmark collective-bargaining agreements with its men's and women's national teams that align their pay and create a unique mechanism to share prize money from their respective World Cup competitions.

The labor agreements follow years of legal pressure on the U.S. federation from members of its four-time World Cup-champion women's team and achieve what the women had been seeking: equal pay.

The new deals are an effort to resolve a thorny pay-equity problem involving two teams with very different pay structures and performance histories. The U.S. women won the past two World Cups but argued they were paid less than the U.S. men's team that failed to qualify for the 2018 tournament.

The new agreements attempt to eliminate those differences by creating "identical economic terms" for the two teams. For friendly games, U.S. Soccer will pay men's and women's players the same roster appearance fees and performance payments, based on the outcome of the match and the rank of the opponent, with the same tiering structures.

For official competitions, including the World Cup, men's and women's players will earn the same game appearance fees. For official competitions outside the World Cup, men and women will also earn the same game bonuses.

The agreements give both men's and women's players significant raises, according to Becca Roux, executive director of the U.S. women's players association.

For instance: A women's player used to earn \$6,750 for making the roster of a team that won a World Cup-qualifying match. Her male counterpart made \$18,125 for the same achievements. Now, the male and female players each will make \$24,000 in that instance.

"I feel a lot of pride that there are a lot of young girls who are going to see what we've accomplished and grow up recognizing their value rather than fighting to find it," U.S. women's player Margaret "Midge" Purce said.

The deals also make an extraordinary bid to erase a disparity that is beyond the control of U.S. Soccer: the gulf in prize money between what soccer's global governing body, FIFA, awards for the men's and women's World Cups. The U.S. women's 2019 title came with a \$4 million prize;

1 in the 2018 men's tournament, teams were paid \$8 million just for qualifying, and the winner was
2 awarded \$38 million.

3 The new deals, the U.S. federation said, make the U.S. the first country where national teams
4 have agreed to pool and share their prize money from the tournaments. To do that, the U.S. men's
5 players will give up some of their World Cup proceeds, no matter where they finish, to achieve
6 the even split of prize money with the women.

7 "I don't want that to be overlooked," said U.S. Soccer President Cindy Parlow Cone, a former
8 U.S. women's player. "I think our men should be celebrated and congratulated. I think we're all
9 very thankful for them coming to the table and making this historic deal possible."

10 It wasn't, however, an easy discussion on the men's side.

11 "I can't say that every conversation was easy with every member that was on our team, or
12 involved with our negotiations," U.S. men's player Walker Zimmerman said. "But at the end of
13 the day, the guys came together and said, 'This is what we need to do to get a deal done and this
14 is how we can grow the game collectively.' "

15 As part of the deals, U.S. Soccer will share a portion of its broadcast-rights and sponsorship
16 revenue with the men's and women's teams, another first.

17 The women's team reaching a new labor agreement was a requirement of the \$24 million
18 settlement deal reached in February by U.S. Soccer and the dozens of women's players who sued
19 it for gender discrimination in 2019. The settlement still needs final approval by the court.

20 Getting the labor deals done took unprecedented cooperation. The two players' associations
21 previously negotiated separate deals in separate years. This time, the men and women negotiated
22 and reached deals that run concurrently. The deals' implementation date is June 1, and they run
23 through 2028.

24 The new agreements eliminate most aspects of the problem that had dogged the debate over pay:
25 how to compare the compensation of two teams whose contracts paid them in very different
26 ways.

27 Under their previous labor deal, top U.S. women's players were paid base salaries along with
28 appearance, game and other bonuses.

The U.S. men, meanwhile, were paid almost entirely in appearance and game bonuses, but those
bonuses were much higher than those offered to the women.

In March 2019, after failing to gain traction with a 2016 complaint to the federal Equal
Employment Opportunity Commission, members of the U.S. women's national team sued U.S.

1 Soccer. They alleged the federation illegally paid them less than the U.S. men's team and
2 provided them with inferior staffing, travel and playing venues.

3 In May 2020, a federal judge threw out the women's pay claims, ruling that they had provided
4 insufficient evidence. The women appealed the decision. They also gained a partial settlement
5 with U.S. Soccer to improve working conditions.

6 As the litigation dragged on, acrimony between the federation and the women's team damaged
7 U.S. Soccer's image.

8 Several of U.S. Soccer's sponsors publicly criticized a 2020 court filing by the federation arguing
9 that male players carried "more responsibility" and had a "higher level of skill" than women's
10 players.

11 The labor deals come as federation revenues are surging. Earlier this year, U.S. Soccer reached
12 an eight-year deal for the English-language broadcasts of men's and women's national-team
13 games on Turner Sports and HBO for \$25 million to \$27 million a year, according to Sports
14 Business Journal.

15 The U.S. women have won four of the eight Women's World Cups held since the tournament's
16 1991 launch. The U.S. men have never won the men's World Cup, which was launched in 1930.
17 After missing the 2018 World Cup, the U.S. men qualified for the 2022 tournament.
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