

Why did the Matildas Strike?

In June 2015, the Australian women's national football team, the Matildas, were the toast of the nation. The Matildas had performed outstandingly well at the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup in Canada, achieving a history-making, best-ever performance by an Australian football team, in reaching the quarter-finals at a World Cup.



Fast forward to September 2015 and the Matildas went on strike and formally withdrew from their sold-out US tour. What was going on?

Going back to the lead-up to the world cup, the Matildas had been required to attend a 6-month preparation program. Several players had to lose their employment elsewhere to be able to participate in this program. During the cup it was also revealed that the Matildas would be paid less if they made it to the final, than the Socceroos would be paid for a single game.

What did this look like? Well in 2015 the Agreements with Football Australia looked like this...

What the women earn	What the men earn
\$21,000 annual contract or \$150 daily wage, plus:	\$240 daily wage, a share in commercial profits from matches played and sponsor bonuses, plus:
\$500 per standard international game	\$6500 per standard international game
\$500 per group-stage tournament game	\$7500 per group-stage tournament game
\$750 per tournament quarter-final game	\$8500 per quarter-final tournament game
\$1250 per tournament semi-final or third or fourth-place playoff	\$9500 per tournament semi-final or third or fourth-place playoff
\$1500 per tournament final	\$11,500 per tournament final
an equal share in 30 per cent of all prize money	a share in 30 per cent of prize money

Before the US tour, the women's football team was trying to negotiate a new agreement. Their previous agreement had expired in June, they had not been paid for two months and they were not guaranteed payment for the US tour. Let's break down what they were asking for:

Wages:

At the time of the negotiations, the players were paid \$21,000 per year. In 2015 the minimum wage in Australia was \$34,158.80 per year. Before the strike several Matildas players were forced to go on welfare to continue to play for the national team. In contrast, the minimum wage of the men's team started at \$70,000 per year and went as high as \$200,000 per year depending on their performance and contract.

In negotiations before the strike, the Matildas were asking for an increase to \$33-40,000 per year (depending on skill level). The Football Federation Australia rejected this proposal and offered them a 10% increase over 4 years, shifting them from \$21,000 a year to \$23,000 a year. This increase was only being made available to women's who played in Australia's W-league and would exclude player who played overseas.

Resources:

As part of the agreement they were also negotiating for better resources and conditions to allow them to play at their best. While the Socceroos had access to facilities and resources expected for an international team, the Matildas made do with second best. Their access to facilities was limited to when the Socceroos weren't using them. Their equipment and uniforms were hand-me-downs from the Socceroos. In 1988 the women's team had to hand-sew the national crest to their uniforms. After the 2015 World Cup the team tried to keep the shorts they had been issued but were forced to return them.

Support:

Leading into the US tour the Matildas were worried about the support. Previously players had been required to pay for their own travel expenses. For the US tour the players were provided with an economy class ticket. In contrast the Socceroos flew business class. Nor did they have insurance or medical coverages for the tour. If a player had been injured she would have needed to cover all of her own medical expenses. For the young women there was also no parental leave. Players had to choose between having a child and keeping their place on the national team.

"This was an extremely difficult decision to make, however it's simply unfair to continue to expect us to make enormous sacrifices to play for Australia. For the past two months the players have been unpaid and have made every attempt to reach an agreement that gives the women's game a platform for growth. This is about the future of Australian football. We want to establish football as the sport of choice for Australian women, and we want to be one of the best nations in the world."

Lydia Williams - Matildas' Goalkeeper

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