

Ljubljana, July 17, 2023

Open letter from the Slovenian Women's National Football Team to the Football Association of Slovenia

Dear Mr. President of the Football Association of Slovenia (NZS) and the wider Slovenian football community,

On behalf of the Slovenian women's national football team, we wish to share some information about the internal events within the women's national team, which relate to the conditions and interpersonal relationships during team gatherings, training sessions, and communication between players and the staff. As we are approaching the beginning of the Nations League and the start of the new cycle for European Championship (2025) qualification, we aim to represent our team and consequently our country in the best possible manner. Therefore, we believe that it is crucial to establish the best working conditions, including fostering healthy interpersonal relationships within the team.

In 2018, when Borut Jarc replaced the previous head coach, Damir Rob, he also brought along new personnel. Initially, there was visible progress, but in recent years, there had been a lack of development in both our game and training sessions. Despite achieving good results and climbing in the FIFA rankings, which are mostly due to an increasing number of players competing in strong European leagues, the improved quality of players in the Slovenian league, as well as promising young players; we believe that the obstacle for not qualifying to major tournaments is not merely bad luck but rather stagnation in the working process and the lack of building on established foundations.

Allow us to present some of the reasons that we believe contributed to the current situation:

- There is no longer any working chemistry between the players and the coaching staff, which makes the training process significantly harder. Training sessions have become monotonous, and the players know what to expect before the preparations even begin.
- There is a lack of communication between clubs and the national team since the head coach does not want to engage with the clubs.
- The head coach is not fully present during national team training sessions and often leaves them before they are finished, which means he is unaware of individual player's progress and performance.

- There have been inappropriate comments from the head coach, such as “You play like wild pigs,” “Your mother’s pussy,” and “I see your mom.” (Translated from: “Igrate kot divje svinje”, “Pička ti materina” and “Mamo ti vidim”)
- Players who are not part of the starting eleven feel overlooked, some players had no communication with the head coach within the past 6 years.
- Matches and game preparations are conducted in an unprofessional manner, as the preparation for different opponents remains the same. Every match is played the same, even the players suggested alternative strategies. The head coach does not believe it is necessary to develop and train different playing systems that could be used against teams of varying quality. We have been using the same system for six years now.
- In our opinion, the head coach’s approach is highly outdated and autocratic. We have experienced conversations where we were psychologically harassed and mistreated.
- Match analyses are unprofessional. For instance, the players analyze the match by watching it alone, accompanied only by the female assistant coach and physiotherapists, meanwhile the remaining (male) part of the coaching staff leaves the room.
- Individual players’ performance evaluations are based on statistics from the InStat Scout online platform. The head coach uses these statistics to compare players’ performances for the national team and their clubs, accusing them of not playing as well for the national team. His remarks include comments like “You don’t want to score” and “You play like you don’t care” (Translated from: “Nočeš dati gola” and “Igrate preko kurca”). The coaching staff also interferes with our personal lives, including our choice of partners, leading to inappropriate, homophobic, and even racist comments.
- Due to inadequate communication skills, the head coach attempts to manipulate individuals to extract internal information from them about the team.
- We have experienced demeaning treatment regarding our body weight in front of the entire team and coaching staff. At one point, we were required to evaluate our own body weight with a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” gesture. As women, we are especially vulnerable when it comes to our bodies, making this action highly disrespectful. The national team’s staff has pushed players to such an extent that some of us have sought professional psychological help.
- The coaching staff has engaged in individual conversations with players to divide the team, turning us against each other.
- A significant issue that needs to be addressed is alcohol consumption, which is a constant during the national team activities. It is served during meals and immediately after training sessions, with staff consuming alcohol from the national team van. As an example, they even smuggled cans of Union beer

into Turkey, where importing alcoholic beverages is not allowed. On many occasions, we have also observed and heard the intoxication of the coaching staff. For instance, they left the national team camp under the pretense that they had a meeting near Lipica. We ended up having dinner alone at the hotel with the female part of staff.

- The coaching staff is reluctant to accept new physiotherapists based on subjective preferences, leaving the players to assist with physiotherapy due to the shortage of medical care personnel.
- Assistant coach Milomir Kondić, who is also the head coach of the second-division team NK Triglav Kranj, has left national team gatherings due to his own club obligations. For example, he left the national team camp prematurely to attend a match with his club taking place on the same day as our match against Romania in April. In the same gathering, he did not attend the match against Belgium, because of a friendly game with his club. We consider such behavior unacceptable on the national team level.
- The assistant coach has made inappropriate social media posts concerning the Slovenian women's football league and specific clubs, which he later removed.
- Goalkeeper coach Mr. Danilo Vladimir Sergaš is physically incapable of conducting high-quality training at the national team level. Additionally, goalkeepers are not adequately prepared for matches in regard to the opponent we are facing. He arrives at training unprepared, without a specific goal, and his behavior is unprofessional. He has sent inappropriate messages to several players through social media. Despite raising this issue with the head coach multiple times, there has been no change.
- Secretary Uroš Juračič withheld information about SARS-CoV-2 infections during a crucial match against Russia in the qualifiers for the 2022 European Championship in England and with that he seriously endangered our health. As a result, we played the match while being ill, as we were not tested before the game and were unaware that all of us were infected. One player with severe symptoms of the virus watched the match from the team bus, as she traveled to the stadium with the team but was too ill to play. Immediately after the match, we flew to Estonia for another game. Upon arrival at the hotel, we were required to undergo mandatory testing, and almost the entire team tested positive. Consequently, the entire team was evacuated back to Slovenia. Despite the required 10-day quarantine, the secretary wanted to send us home upon arrival at Brnik airport, to save the Football Association money, thus putting the health of our families at risk.
- We believe that during national team activities, the Football Association should provide us with meals. However, in the case of multi-hour journeys, we only receive a lunch package. Players must pay for their drinks and hot meals at the airports, which we find inappropriate.

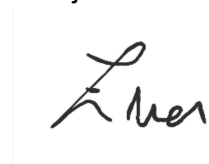
- The Football Association always seeks the most cost-effective flights, regardless of the number of connections and the duration of the journey. In the past, we have traveled for more than 15 hours and spent parts of the night sleeping on chairs and on the floor at the airport. All before playing extremely important matches in the following days.

A few days ago, we sent a list of demands to the leadership of the Football Association of Slovenia (NZS), in which we seek to eliminate long-standing discrimination and gradually equalize the status and conditions of representation with those of the male A national team. Discussions with them regarding these demands have already started and will continue in September.

The conditions of work and interpersonal relationships mentioned in this letter have been attempted to be conveyed to the Football Association of Slovenia's leadership on several occasions, but we have not been given the opportunity to disclose the indicated events. These issues have been persisting for a long time and are escalating. The Slovenian women's national football team deserves and needs professional staff that can prepare the players to represent our country in the best possible way, which will honor both the players and the Association. We are aware that the selection of the coaching staff is within the domain of the Football Association of Slovenia. Based on the presented facts, the current staff is not fulfilling its duties effectively. Therefore, we propose replacing head coach Mr. Borut Jarc and the coaching staff of the Slovenian women's national football team.

Respectfully,

Mateja Zver



Dominika Čonč



Lara Prašnikar




Adrijana Mori



Ana Milović



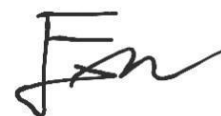
Izabela Križaj



Kaja Korošec



Kaja Eržen



Lana Golob



Lara Klopčič



Špela Kolbl



Zala Kuštrin



Sara Makovec



Nina Predanič



Manja Rogan



Špela Rozmarič



Zala Meršnik



Zara Kramžar



Iva Kocijan



Melania Pasar




Nina Kajzba



Nuša Vidrih



Sara Gradišek



Živa Galjot



Zala Vindišar



Sara Nemet



Korina Janež



Kristina Erman



Nika Babnik



Sara Agrež



Luana Zajmi

