

The National Women's Soccer League (B): Navigating a Crisis, Repairing a Culture

Cate Reavis, Shira Springer, Ben Shields

There definitely has been this shared idea that because two leagues have folded in the past, the NWSL is kind of the last hope for a women's soccer league. Because of that, I feel like there's this idea that we should be grateful for what we have and we shouldn't raise important questions — or ask questions at all.

- Alex Morgan, star forward for the USWNT and Orlando Pride^{li}

NWSL commissioner Lisa Baird's desire to "make the league 'right,' making the strategic investment, to create a sustainable future for the business of women's professional soccer" collided with a crisis of the league's own making. In September 2021, *The Athletic* published a scathing article on North Carolina Courage coach Paul Riley and his abusive style, resulting in his firing and Baird's resignation. Riley and Baird weren't the league's first departures in 2021 nor were they last, in what turned out to be a tumultuous year that raised serious concerns about the league's viability.

But, in early 2022, three key developments gave players, owners and fans reason for optimism about the future. At the end of January, the players and the league agreed to their first collective bargaining agreement (CBA), giving players more money and more control over their careers. Three weeks later, the USWNT settled its equal pay lawsuit, paving the way for members of the women's national team to be paid equally to the men. Then, in early March, shortly before the start of the 2022 season, Cindy Parlow Cone was re-elected president of U.S. Soccer and the NWSL named Jessica Berman the league's new commissioner.

ⁱ Alex Morgan was traded from the Orlando Pride to the San Diego Wave in December 2021 ahead of their inaugural season.

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Did the crises of 2021 trigger some sort of reckoning? As Sarah Spain, co-owner of the Chicago Red Stars and ESPN reporter tweeted, “A reckoning is only a reckoning if you come out better, safer, stronger on the other side. Right now the NWSL hasn’t proven to players that systems are in place to protect and serve them, and the league can only grow into its true potential with leadership that values that most.”²

Recap of 2021: Progress Followed by “Wave of Crisis”

While the NWSL started the 2021 season with positive momentum from the way it successfully managed the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, and initially capitalized on that momentum, the league found itself engulfed in multiple crises by the end of the year. See **Exhibit 1** for a timeline of investigation requests into Paul Riley, responses, and resignations.

League growth dominated national headlines as the NWSL added another California franchise and expanded to 12 teams. In June 2021, Baird announced that San Diego would be home to the NWSL’s next expansion team.³ A year earlier, the league announced that a group of Los Angeles-based investors led by actor Natalie Portman would establish a new team.⁴ The Los Angeles franchise, Angel City FC, and its celebrity-filled ownership of mainly women drew attention throughout 2021 and excitement built for both teams’ 2022 debuts.

Alongside league growth, established franchises were making significant investments in their teams. In September, Kansas City announced plans to build a new \$15 million training facility for its players. and a month later that it would build a \$70 million stadium specifically for women’s soccer.⁵

During 2021, the league expanded its list of sponsors, too, adding Nationwide, Ally, Mastercard, Deloitte, and iHeartMedia. (Even after the season ended, with Baird gone and an interim CEO in place, the NWSL extended its partnership with Nike amid all the tumult.)

Additionally, at the start of the season, the league introduced its Anti-Harassment Policy for a Safe Work Environment, which provided protections for players and created a process for them to file confidential complaints. The first line of the policy states that the NWSL is committed to “creating and maintaining a safe and respectful work environment that is free from all forms of harassment (including sexual harassment) and discrimination.” The league introduced the policy one month after Baird received a letter signed by 240 NWSL players requesting the league adopt a new player-centric policy that ensured a safe and inclusive workplace.

On November 20, the season ended with a championship game that featured the Washington Spirit and the Chicago Red Stars. The Spirit defeated the Red Stars, 2-1, earning the first league title in the club’s eight-year history. But by then, the NWSL was consumed by a “wave of crisis” that exposed toxic team cultures, player abuse, and a troubling lack of transparency by team owners and league executives.

Even the championship game revealed a league culture that failed to make players' health, safety, and performance a consistent priority.

Originally, the league scheduled the championship for a 9:00am start time at a turf stadium in Portland, Oregon. When the initial details of the championship game were announced, Ashlyn Harris, Orlando Pride goalkeeper and U.S. women's national team member, tweeted, "9am start time is laughable. Im [sic] tired of staying quiet. We deserve better." She also tweeted, "Great. Throw us on turf. Sounds like an awesome idea. What's next another baseball field?"⁶ But one sign of an evolving league culture started to materialize: The players successfully pressured the league to move the championship game from Portland to Louisville, Kentucky with a noon start time and a grass field.

The rescheduling of the championship game came at the end of a 2021 season marked by a string of firings and resignations. Between July and November, five out of 10 head coaches, all men, and a woman general manager resigned or were fired for violating the league's new anti-harassment policy. Rory Dames, the head coach of the Chicago Red Stars, was one of the resignations. As *The Washington Post* prepared to publish an investigation that detailed his emotionally abusive behavior toward players and allegations of sexual misconduct, Dames resigned a mere two days after the Red Stars lost in the championship game. According to the investigation, Dames's behavior dated back decades. A former youth soccer player filed a complaint in 1998 with the Arlington, Illinois police department accusing him of touching her inappropriately.⁷ More recently, in 2018, U.S. Soccer, then managing the NWSL, dismissed a complaint filed by a Red Stars player about Dames's behavior.⁸

The turmoil and the departures continued into early 2022, and this time it involved a team owner. Steve Baldwin, the majority investor in the 2021 championship-winning Washington Spirit, stood accused of fostering an "old boys' club" culture. He reluctantly agreed to sell his stake to minority investor Michele Kang. Players on the Spirit had been asking him to step aside since October 2021.

But it was *The Athletic's* investigation into Paul Riley that exposed the league's problematic culture, harmful power dynamics and organizational blind spots, and turned the wave of crisis into an existential threat.

"This Guy Has a Pattern"

The Athletic's September 30, 2021 story detailed incidents of sexual coercion, emotional and verbal abuse, and retaliation by the veteran, championship-winning coach that spanned more than a decade. It exposed a toxic league culture enabled by predominantly white, male team owners, who did little to protect their players. In 2015, when Riley coached the Portland Thorns, Sinead Farrelly, a player on the team, filed a complaint about his behavior with the franchise's front office. After a week-long investigation, Portland announced it would not be renewing Riley's contract. The investigation concluded that Riley violated team policy, but provided no other specifics. The investigation's findings

were shared with the league. Five months later, Riley was coaching another NWSL team: the New York Flash.

In addition to exposing Riley's behavior, the story chronicled how players kept quiet about abuse out of fear of jeopardizing their careers and the future of women's professional soccer in the U.S. Also, there were no formal, anonymous channels in place to issue complaints. As Meg Linehan, author of *The Athletic's* story about Riley wrote,

For most of the last two decades, one of women's soccer's governing mores has been a willingness to stay silent. As the sport tried, failed, and tried again to gain traction in the United States, any controversy was viewed as a threat to the sport's existence, with the potential to shut down a team or even an entire league. Women in the sport felt disempowered, understanding that they were to keep quiet about disrespectful coaches and mistreatment by office staff, about poor pay and substandard facilities.⁹

As *The Athletic* story went viral, the NWSL found itself in the midst of an existential crisis that gathered momentum by the hour. Riley was immediately fired and U.S. Soccer suspended his coaching license. (See **Exhibit 2** for statement from North Carolina Courage.) Commissioner Lisa Baird tweeted her shock and disgust over the allegations and emphasized the league's commitment to player safety. (**Exhibit 3**) In response, Alex Morgan tweeted an email exchange that revealed Baird knew about allegations against Riley earlier than she publicly claimed. (**Exhibit 4**) After the NWSL introduced its anti-harassment policy in April 2021, two players from the 2015 Portland Thorns team, Farrelly and Mana Shim asked Baird to reopen the investigation into Riley. Like Farrelly, Shim had been sexually coerced and verbally abused by Riley. Baird responded that their initial, respective complaints had been thoroughly investigated to their conclusion and that she could not share details.¹⁰

Barely 24-hours after *The Athletic* story dropped, Baird resigned followed by the league's general counsel, Lisa Levine. Baird tweeted a personal statement a few days later. (**Exhibit 5**) Games were cancelled to give the players time and space to process everything.¹¹ (See **Exhibit 6** for statement from NWSLPA.) On social media, fans demanded change and called out owners for poor leadership, citing the hiring of problem coaches along with a lack of transparency and accountability at the team and league levels. In Portland, fans boycotted merchandise and concessions. (**Exhibit 7**) U.S. Soccer, which managed the NWSL until December 2020, reopened investigations into Riley and the NWSL. Meanwhile, league leaders faced a reckoning they could not have imagined a few months, even a few weeks, earlier. On October 3, the NWSL's Board of Governors announced the league was launching a series of investigative and reform-oriented initiatives to protect players and staff. (See **Exhibit 8** for list of initiatives.) And then came the players' demands.

Power Moves: Players Push Agenda and League Listens

Demands Made

On October 6, the NWSL resumed play for the first time since the news about Riley broke. Just before the first whistle blew, the NWSLPA released a statement: “Teams will stop play in each of tonight's games at the 6th minute. Players will join together in solidarity at the center circle for one minute in recognition of the 6 years it took for Mana, Sinead, and all those who fought for too long to be heard. We call on fans to stand in silence with us. During that time, we ask you to stand in that pain and discomfort with us, as we consider what too many of us have been asked to sit with for too long.”¹²

During the pause in play, the NWSLPA issued an 8-point list of demands to the league. On behalf of the players, the NWSLPA demanded that every coach, general manager, board of governor representative, and owner voluntarily submit to the NWSLPA's independent investigation into abusive conduct. Players demanded the scope of the NWSL's investigation announced on October 3 be expanded to include all 12 NWSL clubs and to determine whether any league office staff, NWSL club, or person in a position of power within the NWSL neglected to investigate concerns of abuse raised by a player or staff member at any point in time. Players demanded the NWSL's findings from its investigation be disclosed to the NWSLPA. Finally, they demanded a say in the selection of the league's next commissioner. (See **Exhibit 9** for full list of demands.)

On October 29, the NWSLPA announced that the league had agreed to meet all eight demands.

NWSL CBA

On February 1, the day the 2022 NWSL preseason began, the NWSLPA announced that the union had ratified and NWSL's Board of Governors had approved the league's first collective bargaining agreement. It was the first CBA for women's professional soccer in the United States. (**Exhibit 10**)

In addition to higher salaries and more benefits, the CBA gave NWSL players what they had long asked for: more control over their careers in the form of free agency. Prior to the new CBA, players had no say in where they played. Also, teams could trade them with no warning. This happened to Kristin Hamilton who learned at the beginning of practice with her current team that she was expected to be at practice with her new team, nearly 1,100 miles away, the next day.¹³ As she noted, prior to the CBA being approved, “I can be in this league for seven-plus years and not have a say in where I go or what I do. I'm almost 30 years old and have almost no control over my career.”¹⁴ While players could still be traded with little or no warning, the CBA gave them more freedom of movement with free agency.

Free agency – a process that allows players with expired contracts to sign with whichever team wants them – would begin in 2023 for those with a minimum of six years in the league. In 2024, players with five years in the league could become full free agents. Also in 2024, players with three years in the

NWSL could become restricted free agents, giving them the freedom to sign an offer from another team if their original team does not match the offer.

While the CBA ensured players had more control of where they played, many wondered if it went far enough to enable the culture change the players so desperately wanted.

U.S. Soccer Settlement

A couple of weeks after the NWSL announced the CBA, U.S. Soccer and the 28 current and former members of the USWNT who brought a class action lawsuit alleging their employer was in violation of the Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, reached a settlement. The two sides had been at odds over the pay disparity between members of the men's and women's teams since 2016.

As part of the settlement, U.S. Soccer, led by former USWNT member Cindy Parlow Cone since 2018 and who was running for re-election, agreed to pay the group \$24 million, most of which was back pay. Of equal importance, U.S. Soccer promised to equalize pay between the men's and women's national teams for all friendlies (non-competitive games, also known as exhibitions) and tournaments, including the World Cup. The settlement was an unexpected victory for the USWNT players, 22 of whom played in the NWSL.¹⁵ In 2020, a judge dismissed their case stating that the women's team had earned more "on both a cumulative and average per-game basis during the years at issue in the lawsuit."¹⁶ USWNT and NWSL player Megan Rapinoe's reaction at the time: "You can look at the total compensation and say, 'Oh, the women's team made a little bit more.' In that time that we made just a little bit more, we've won two World Cups and we've won just about every single game that we've played in. So the rate of pay is just so different."¹⁷

Terms of the settlement were contingent on the ratification of a new CBA between U.S. Soccer and the USWNT's player's union. The current CBA expired on March 31, 2022.

Despite the USWNT's victory, sports journalist Caitlin Murray tweeted a reminder that the NWSL still had a lot of work to do: "The equal pay settlement is big for the #USWNT, but abuse in the #NWSL and beyond remains an issue. When you look at the boardroom coup it took for the Spirit to change owners, and the lack of change in Portland and Chicago, is there any reason for hope?"¹⁸

Leadership

Just weeks before the start of the 2022 Challenge Cup competition, two key leadership announcements were made, on back-to-back days, involving the USWNT and the NWSL.

First, on March 8, U.S. Soccer's membership re-elected Cindy Parlow Cone to another four-year term as president of U.S. Soccer. Parlow Cone had held off a challenge by Carlos Cordeiro, who resigned from the presidency in 2018 after serving just two years. Under Cordeiro, U.S. Soccer's legal filings for the equal pay lawsuit made disparaging remarks about women's soccer including: "the job of

[Men's National Team] player carries more responsibility within U.S. Soccer than the job of WNT player." The filing also noted that the jobs of an MNT player "requires a higher level of skill based on speed and strength."¹⁹

In her acceptance speech, Parlow Cone said, "The moment of division is now in the past. We are one federation. We are one team. I promise to be the leader for all of U.S. Soccer. I have never been more excited and more hopeful about the future of our beautiful game."²⁰

On March 9, the NWSL announced that Jessica Berman would be its new commissioner. Her first day would be April 20. Berman was coming from the National Lacrosse League where she had been deputy commissioner and executive vice president of business affairs since 2019. Prior to that, she had been with the NHL for 13 years with her most recent role as vice president community development, culture, and growth. While the Board of Governors made the ultimate hiring decision, players were very involved in the process, including interviewing candidates. Themes of trust and league growth largely drove the search discussions.

Working with an executive search firm, the NWSL put together two internal search committees: one for the Board of Governors and one for players including the executive director of the NWSLPA. Berman noted that she had never experienced a league involving players in the commissioner interviewing process. In her interview with the players' search committee, Berman asked them, "Given everything that's transpired, do you feel that the league can move forward? How do you feel that we can work together? Are there opportunities for us to partner, collaborate, grow? Are you ready to turn the page and give someone a chance?" She also highlighted that "players are the league's most important asset."²¹

Measuring Success

As the NWSL's players looked towards a new season with a new leader and with new faces in the head coaching ranks, they had become an integral part of the conversation about the league's future. Specifically, their input on questions of culture and growing the league into a successful business entity would play a critical role.

Before resigning, Baird spoke about plans for the league's 10th anniversary season in 2022, including rebranding for the next decade. With the rebrand, Baird wanted to grow the league's fanbase, gain more media exposure, expand into new markets with new teams, and achieve more financial security with more revenue streams and new, longer-term sponsorship deals.

Assuming Berman had similar goals, what does success for the league look like in the short- and long-term? How does the "reckoning" change the way the league measures success? Could Berman balance the competing priorities of the players and owners?

Exhibit 1 A Timeline of Investigation Requests, Responses, and Resignations

July 30, 2020 Assistant coach for Washington Spirit, Tom Torres, leaves the club after being accused of sexually inappropriate comments made to players at a party.

September 2020 Dell Loy Hansen sells Utah Royals FC upon reports of racist comments and a sexist culture at club's front office.

November 9, 2020 Utah Royals FC fires head coach Craig Harrington. Harrington is placed on administrative in September.

March 9, 2021 240 NWSL players sign a letter for commissioner Lisa Baird asking that a the 8-page player handbook be updated to include nine specific elements to ensure player safety and inclusive workplaces across the league.

March 15, 2021 Meleana Shim emails Baird, attaching her 2015 complaint, asking her to address the "apparent failure" of the Portland Thorns' 2015 investigation into Riley's behavior.

March 16, 2021 Baird responds to Shim, thanking her for her email and telling her she planned to meet with a group of players to hear their concerns about player safety.

April 9, 2021 Baird writes to Shim that the league files indicate her complaint was investigated in 2015 and that she (Baird) was not at liberty to share more information.

April 28, 2021 Farrelly emails Baird, cc'ing the HR email address listed on the new anti-harassment policy, saying that she witnessed and experienced Riley's inappropriate conduct and was part of the 2015 complaint.

May 5, 2021 Baird responds to Farrelly repeating much of what she wrote to Shim on April 9. File was reviewed, investigation completed, nothing more to share.

July 2, 2021 OL Reign head coach Farid Benstiti resigns after being accused of making inappropriate comments to players.

July 9, 2021 Gotham FC fires general manager Alyse LaHue after investigation finds she breached the league's new anti-harassment policy.

August 31, 2021 Racing Louisville head coach Christy Holly fired for cause. No other details were given.

September 29, 2021 Washington Spirit terminates head coach Richie Burke after investigation finds he was verbally and emotionally abusive to players. Burke initially stepped down in August citing “health concerns” taking a front office job with the team.

September 30, 2021 North Carolina coach Paul Riley fired for misconduct.

October 1, 2021 Commissioner Lisa Baird resigns.

November 22, 2021 Chicago Red Stars head coach Rory Dames resigns after *The Washington Post* reveals multiple allegations of emotional and verbal abuse.

February 2022 Washington Spirit majority owner Steve Baldwin sells his stake to Michele Kang.

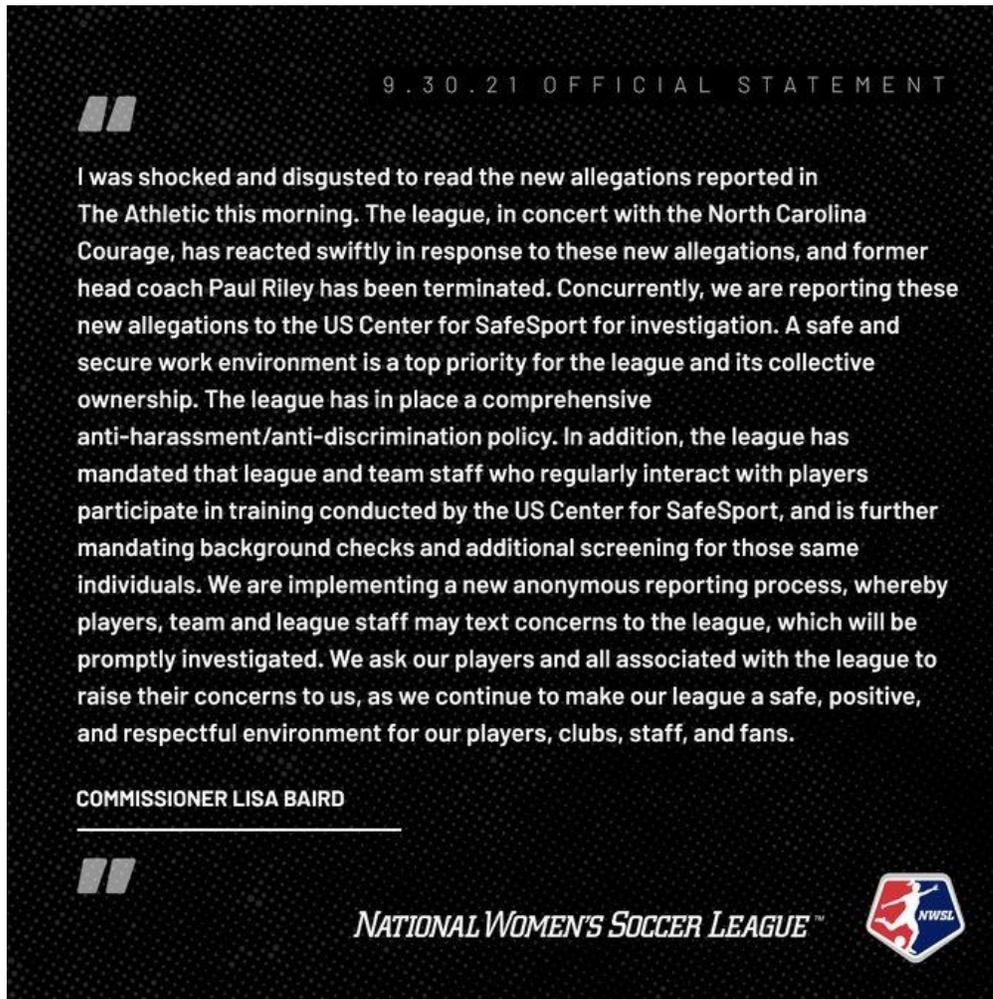
Source: Casewriters.

Exhibit 2 Statement from North Carolina Courage about Termination of Paul Riley



Source: [Twitter](#), accessed March 15, 2022.

Exhibit 3 Statement from Commissioner Lisa Baird about Athletic Report



Source: [Twitter](#), accessed March 5, 2022.

Exhibit 4 Email from Sinead Farrelly to Lisa Baird about Paul Riley Investigation

From: Sinead Farrelly <[REDACTED]>
Date: April 28, 2021 at 3:43:00 PM EDT
To: Lisa Baird <lbaird@nwslsoccer.com>, HR Office <HROffice@nwslsoccer.com>
Subject: Complaint

Dear Lisa Baird,

I write as a former soccer player in the National Women's Soccer League and in connection with the recently enacted policies to protect players and staff and to ensure a safe and inclusive workplace for all.

I am writing to report that when I was player for the Portland Thorns in 2015, I not only witnessed but also experienced firsthand extremely inappropriate conduct by Mr. Riley. In 2015, I described such conduct in an interview with Thorn's staff as part of a separate investigation regarding Mr. Riley. In addition to the experiences I reported in the 2015 investigation, Mr. Riley repeatedly made harassing comments about my personal relationships and sexual orientation to other players and directly to myself. No one from either the team or the NWSL ever independently investigated my allegations that I raised in the 2015 investigation, despite their serious nature. I also note that numerous instances of severe misconduct involving Mr. Riley occurred prior to my time playing for the NWSL. Such conduct should have no place in women's soccer. Upon the conclusion of that 2015 investigation of which I took part, Mr. Riley was removed from the Portland Thorns, but the NWSL soon thereafter announced that he would coach the North Carolina Courage.

I am bringing this to the League's attention so that I can understand what steps, if any, the League intends to take in connection with the inappropriate conduct that was initially reported, given the apparent failure of the NWSL to take any action to protect players in response to the initial complaint. I am deeply concerned for the safety of current players given that Mr. Riley continues to coach in the NWSL. I can also make myself available for an interview if the NWSL would like to discuss further. If the NWSL could respond by April 30, 2021 that would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Sinead Farrelly

From: Lisa Baird <lbaird@nwslsoccer.com>
Date: Wed, May 5, 2021 at 6:56 AM
Subject: Complaint
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Aries Pickett <apickett@nwslsoccer.com>, Lisa Levine <levine@nwslsoccer.com>

Sinead,

Thank you for your email, and for sharing with me your past experiences with the league. I appreciate that coming forward in 2015 and again now might not have been easy. We reviewed our files and I can confirm that the initial complaint was investigated to conclusion. Unfortunately, I cannot share any additional details.

NWSL takes the safety of its players very seriously, and believes that all players should have a safe and secure environment in which to play. I also want you to know that in early April, the *NWSL Anti-Harassment Policy for a Safe Work Environment* was published to all players, team staff, league staff and owners. This policy, which was developed with input from the NWSLPA, clearly states the expectations and requirements of all those involved in our league and is a part of our ongoing commitment to creating and maintaining a safe and respectful work environment.

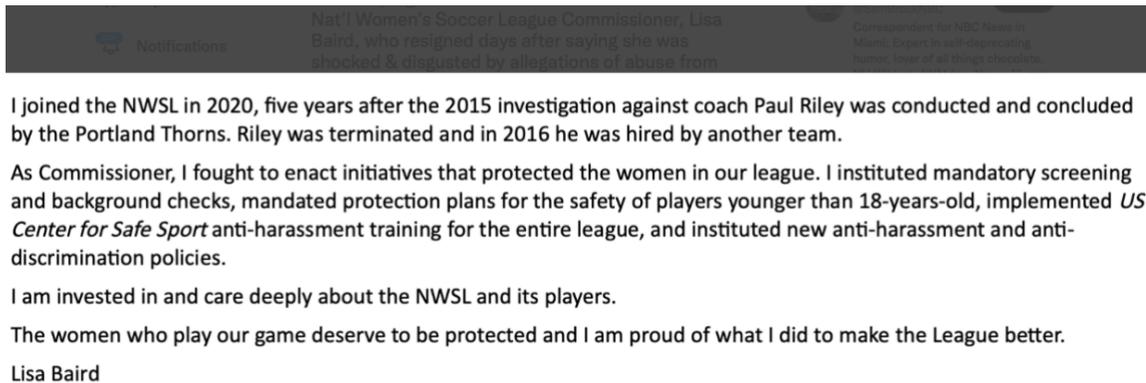
I am committed to ensuring that all our processes at the League, at our clubs and with outside authorities are transparent, accessible to players and, most importantly effective.

Thank you again for your email and I wish you the best.

Lisa Baird

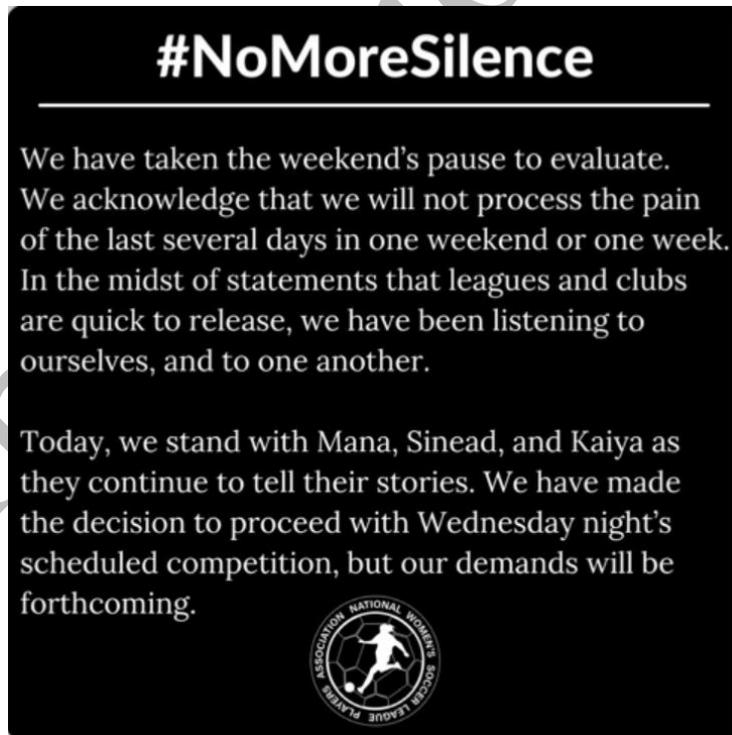
Source: [Twitter](#), accessed March 5, 2022.

Exhibit 5 Lisa Baird's Statement upon Resigning from NWSL



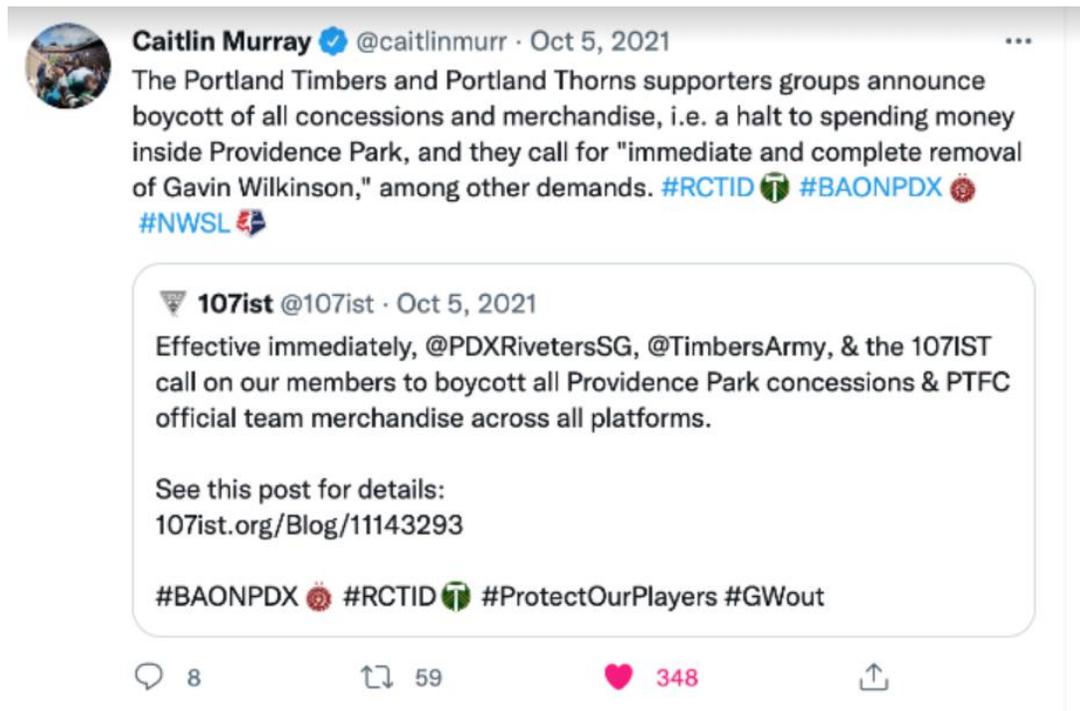
Source: [Twitter](#), accessed March 5, 2022.

Exhibit 6 Statement from NWSLPA about Athletic Article and Subsequent Fallout



Source: [Twitter](#), accessed March 30, 2022.

Exhibit 7 Portland Timbers and Thorns Announce Boycott



Source: [Twitter](#), accessed March 20, 2022.

Exhibit 8 NWSL Board of Governors Investigative and Reform Initiatives

Those initiatives include:

- An independent review of practices and policies at the league and club levels -- including workplace policies for each club in the league, league-mandated anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policy, and processes for identifying, investigating, and enforcing violations of those policies -- to identify and reform deficiencies. The league will work with the players association to ensure that the results of these team and league reviews will serve as a road map to ensure safe environments for players and staff.
- Comprehensive policies and procedures created for the league and all member clubs to ensure moving forward that there is a systematic, transparent, and effective execution of any harassment or workplace conduct issues.
- A reopening of the 2015 investigation regarding former NWSL coach Paul Riley, including a review of the circumstances surrounding his departure from the Portland Thorns FC, and his subsequent hiring by Western New York Flash and the North Carolina Courage.
- A review of the available investigative reports related to all historical complaints of discrimination, harassment, or abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) in the NWSL, and

where necessary, a reopening of the respective investigation, or the initiation of a new adjudication process.

- The continuation of ongoing investigations initiated under the NWSL's current anti-harassment policy, and the recommendation of sanctions where appropriate.

Source: Jeff Carlisle, "[NWSL Announces Executive Committee in Wake of Misconduct Allegations](#)," ESPN, October 3, 2021, accessed February 5, 2022.

Exhibit 9 NWSLPA List of Demands

1. Every coach, general manager, representative on the Board of Governors, and owner voluntarily submit to the Players Association's independent investigation into abusive conduct. They may notify executive director Meghann Burke of their agreement with this demand by the close of business on Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2021.
2. The scope of NWSL's investigation announced on Sunday evening, Oct. 4, 2021 be expanded to include an investigation of each of the 12 NWSL Clubs represented on the Board of Governors to determine whether any abuse, whether presently known or unknown, has occurred at any point in time.
3. The scope of NWSL's investigation further be expanded to determine whether any league office staff, NWSL club, or person in a position of power within NWSL neglected to investigate concerns of abuse raised by any player or staff member at any point in time.
4. NWSL adopt an immediate "Step Back Protocol" whereby any person in a position of power (e.g. owner, representative on the Board of Governors, general manager, or management supervisor) at the time that a club either hired or separated from employment a coach who was, is, or will be under investigation for abuse be suspended from any governance or oversight role within NWSL pending the conclusion of an independent investigation, effectively immediately. For any club that took swift action to protect players upon the discovery of facts that were not previously known to the club, the immediate disclosure to the Players Association of the circumstances and the policies or practices implemented to prevent the same from happening again may be grounds to restore that person to their position quickly, with the Players Association's agreement.
5. NWSL immediately agree to disclose all investigative reports referenced in its statement of Oct. 3, 2021.
6. NWSL immediately agree to disclose to the Players Association any and all findings, conclusions, and reports that are obtained pursuant to their statement of Oct. 3, 2021, including but not limited to the reopening of the 2015 Paul Riley investigation.
7. NWSL agrees to cooperate with the Players Association's own independent investigation by written email to executive director Meghann Burke by the close of business on Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2021.

8. NWSL agrees that representatives of the Players Association have an opportunity to meet with potential commissioner candidates and have a meaningful opportunity to be heard in the selection of the next commissioner.

Source: Sandra Herrera, "[NWSL Agrees to Eight Demands...](#)" CBS Sports, October 29, 2021, accessed March 1, 2022.

Exhibit 10 Portions of NWSL CBA

The 5-year CBA included:

- **Salary:** 60% increase in minimum salary for 2022. Up from \$22,000 in 2021 to \$35,000 in 2022. Step ladder increases for players making more than minimum salary.
- **Benefits:** 401(k) program starting in 2023 with matching contributions; waived players receive four weeks of severance and 30 additional days of health insurance and housing support; eight weeks of paid parental leave, including for adoption; up to six months paid mental health leave.
- **Free agency:** Free agency would begin in 2023 for players with a minimum of six years with the league. In 2024, players with three years in NWSL could become restricted free agents, they could sign an offer with another team but the original team could retain the player by matching the offer, while players with five years in the league could become full free agents.
- **Player health and safety:** Medical personnel: teams were required to provide additional medical staff including a team physician, massage therapist, sports scientist, sports psychologist, mental health provider. Attempt to get rid of turf fields. Clause "No more playing on fields that require substantial conversion to the dimensions of a soccer field."

Source: Caitlin Murray, "[Free Agency, Higher Salaries Part of First-ever CBA Between Players, NWSL](#)," ESPN, January 31, 2022, accessed February 14, 2022.

Endnotes

¹ Meg Linehan, “[This Guy Has a Pattern](#),” *The Athletic*, September 30, 2021, accessed December 14, 2022.

² [Twitter](#), accessed March 8, 2022.

³ Jeff Kassouf, “[San Diego Confirmed as 2022 NWSL Expansion Market](#),” *The Equalizer*, June 8, 2021, accessed February 10, 2022.

⁴ Avi Creditor, “[NWSL Reveals 2022 Los Angeles Expansion Team...](#)” *Sports Illustrated*, July 21, 2020, accessed February 10, 2022.

⁵ “[Kansas City to Build First U.S. Stadium Specifically for Women’s Soccer](#),” *ESPN*, October 27, 2021, accessed March 16, 2022.

⁶ Scott Allen, “[NWSL Players Criticize Decision to Host Championship Game on Turf at 9 a.m.](#),” *The Washington Post*, September 6, 2021, accessed March 10, 2022.

⁷ Molly Hensley-Clancy, “[Nobody Believed those Teenagers](#),” *The Washington Post*, February 8, 2022, accessed March 8, 2022.

⁸ Caitlin Murray, “[Lack of Accountability Among NWSL Owners Makes You Wonder](#),” *ESPN*, February 22, 2022, accessed March 8, 2022.

⁹ [Twitter](#), accessed February 25, 2022.

¹⁰ Meg Linehan, “[This Guy Has a Pattern](#),” *The Athletic*, September 30, 2021, accessed December 14, 2022.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Jim Reineking, “[NWSL Players Pause Games in Demonstration in Wake of Paul Riley Sexual Misconduct Revelations](#),” *USA Today*, October 7, 2021, accessed March 29, 2022.

¹³ Steph Yang, “[‘A Fear Based System’: How the Structure of Sports Protects Abusers of Power](#),” *The Athletic*, October 1, 2021, accessed March 8, 2022.

¹⁴ Alex Azzi, “[NWSL Trades Expose Need for CBA, Free Agency](#),” *NBC Sports*, December 3, 2021, accessed March 8, 2022.

¹⁵ Andrew Das, “[U.S. Soccer and Women’s Players Agree to Settle Equal Pay Lawsuit](#),” *The New York Times*, February 22, 2022, accessed March 10, 2022.

¹⁶ Andrew Das, “[U.S. Women’s Soccer Team’s Equal Pay Demands Are Dismissed by Judge](#),” *The New York Times*, May 1, 2020, accessed March 14, 2022.

¹⁷ Jill Martin, "[U.S. Women's National Soccer Team Players Ask for Appeal...](#)" *CNN*, May 9, 2020, accessed March 16, 2022.

¹⁸ [Twitter](#), accessed February 5, 2022).

¹⁹ Kevin Draper, "[U.S. Soccer President Carlos Cordeiro Resigns](#)," *The New York Times*, March 12, 2020, accessed March 28, 2022.

²⁰ Brian Straus, "[U.S. Soccer Narrowly Votes the Stay the Course, Avoid an Uncomfortable Transition](#)," *Sports Illustrated*, March 5, 2022, accessed March 28, 2022.

²¹ Steph Yang, "[What Convinced the NWSL Owners and Players that Jessica Berman Should Be the League's Next Commissioner?](#)" *The Athletic*, March 10, 2022, accessed March 15, 2022.