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Argentina's first trans pro soccer player takes the field in historic match

The 23-year-old waited nearly a year after being signed to play her first game this past Monday.

By James Factora

Them (08.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3p0MXhB> - After nearly a year of delays, Mara Gómez has become the first trans woman to play professional soccer for Argentina.

On Monday, the 23-year-old striker for Club Atlético Villa San Carlos, which represents the coastal city of Berisso, competed in a match against fellow women's soccer team Club Atlético Lanús, according to ESPN. Although Villa San Carlos lost in a staggering 7-1 defeat, it was still a happy occasion for Gómez, who was gifted a jersey with her name on it by members of the opposing club after the game.

Gómez, who is 23, was initially signed to the team in January but faced questioning from the Argentine Football Association (AFA) with regards to whether or not trans women have an "unfair advantage" over cis women athletically. According to the New York Daily News, Gómez completed blood tests which proved that her testosterone levels are no higher than those of the "average" cisgender woman, in compliance with the standards of the International Olympic Committee. The AFA announced its decision last week, and the rest is history in the making.

In an interview with ESPN, Gómez admitted that she did not think she'd be among the ranks of the many hobbyists who get to go pro. "When I started out, football was a therapy for me, and I couldn't think it was possible to dream or consider playing in the top division," she said.

While Argentinian athletes might be subject to the governing laws of international athletics organizations, Argentina is known for having some of the most progressive trans-specific legislation in the world, including its 2012 Gender Identity Law. The legislation allows trans people to change their name and gender for free, access hormones and surgery through its public healthcare system and provides protections against gender-based discrimination.

Much of the world at large — including the sports world — remains unfortunately regressive, however. Although myths about supposed difference in performance between trans and cis athletes have been repeatedly debunked, the question of whether or not to allow trans and intersex athletes (and those perceived as such) to compete alongside their peers is a contentious one. On Monday, The Guardian published findings from a study that purports that trans women who have pursued hormonal transition maintain an athletic edge over cis women, but t's limited to the fitness records of 46 trans women who started hormones while in the U.S. Air Force.

In contrast, a literature review published in the medical journal *Sports Medicine* in 2016 found “no direct or consistent research” to suggest that trans female athletes “have an athletic advantage at any stage of their transition.” If anything, trans athletes were found to be at a significant disadvantage, due to a “lack of inclusive and comfortable environments.” Trans athletes were discovered to have had “mostly negative experience” because of restrictive policies, the majority of which were not evidence-based.

It is also worth noting that athletes such as Michael Phelps, who has won the most Olympic medals of all time at a staggering 28, are not similarly scrutinized for their supposed “biological advantages” or mandated to physically alter themselves. Instead, as a white, cisgender man, Phelps’ physiology is a source of fascination.

Despite this, athletes like two-time Olympic champion Caster Semenya, still must fight such policies in order to be allowed to compete among their peers without undergoing invasive “sex testing” or taking hormone-suppressing medications. The 29-year-old athlete, who is a cisgender woman, is currently taking her case to the European Court of Human Rights in hopes of overturning these archaic rules once and for all.

Gómez might be Argentina’s first trans woman soccer player, but as athletes break down these barriers, hopefully she will be far from the last. She joins recently out sports stars Quinn and Ness Murby as some of the highest profile trans athletes competing today.

While there’s still a long way to go, Gómez told ESPN that having a trans woman openly embraced for her identity on the field shows how far society has come. “A few years back this was unthinkable to talk about or debate, but now we are opening new roads,” Gómez added. “This is a huge achievement. I’m proud to represent a community but also a part of society and to know that I have become a reference for a lot of people.”
