



Confidential Instructions for the General Manager of the St. Louis Storm

You have been the General Manager of the St. Louis Storm, a professional soccer team in the U.S. Women's Soccer League (UWSL), for one year. As a member of the famous 1987 gold medal-winning U.S. Olympic Soccer Team, you were recruited as General Manager because of your vast knowledge of the skills and strategies necessary to become a soccer powerhouse. Your job as General Manager is to turn around the Storm's fortunes and make them a successful team.

Four years ago, the Storm embarked on a long-term strategy to build up a cohort of young, talented players to be the future face of the franchise. Rebuilding a team inevitably leads to fewer wins and a loss in ticket and merchandise sales, but it pays off in dividends once those young players develop into super stars. Unfortunately, the Storm's young players never became stars, and many of those with potential signed with other teams that could afford to pay them a higher salary. This led to several seasons of losses, both on the field and financially.

Five years ago, when the Storm were at the peak of their success, the team sold 90% of the seats in their stadium, an above-average figure for the league. Last season, they only sold 60% of the seats in the stadium, making the St. Louis Storm one of the worst teams in the league in ticket sales. Merchandise sales, which are an important revenue stream for the team, have also been on the decline. Five years ago, the team made \$5 million in revenue from merchandise sales. By last year, that number had plummeted to \$1 million.

As a result of these dismal numbers, the Storm have been unable to offer the kind of contracts that will recruit experienced stars capable of training and mentoring younger players. Over the past two seasons, several key team members left for other teams, and replacing them has been very difficult. The Storm desperately need to make the playoffs this year. Not only will this increase excitement in their fan base, but teams that make the playoffs receive a bonus of \$500,000.

To complicate matters, the Storm's player in the position of starting forward unexpectedly left the team due to a serious illness. While she wasn't the best forward in the league, she had a lot of potential and a very affordable contract – \$100,000 per season. There is not much time to recruit another starting forward before the new season begins, and you are concerned that you won't be able to find a suitable replacement that the team can afford.

Last week, you got a call from an agent for Terri Fields, a forward who was drafted by the Storm ten years ago and was the team's star player in the early years of her career. She rose to fame in her second season when she scored a goal from mid-field in the last minute of play in the division title game, clinching the title for the Storm and skyrocketing ticket and merchandise sales. Over the next four years, she led the team to two UWSL National Championships and won back-to-back UWSL MVP titles as well.

Beyond her incredible talent as a player, Fields was known for her larger-than-life personality and showboating antics. She was a fan favorite in the league, and many people in the stands were there just to see what Fields would do next. Her jersey was the top-selling piece of merchandise not only for the Storm but for the entire league. She scored endorsement deals with major companies, which led to

unprecedented corporate sponsorships for the Storm. Fields not only became the face of the UWSL, she also became one of the best paid players at \$120,000 per season.

Then, in the first game of the season four years ago, Fields suffered a debilitating injury to her knee and was unable to play for the remainder of the year. As the Storm embarked on their strategy to build the skills of young, talented players, they didn't see Fields fitting into their vision. There was no guarantee that she would bounce back from her knee injury, making her expensive contract a big risk. Beyond this, Fields was never known as a good mentor and was a fairly selfish player on the field. The Storm decided to trade Fields to the Miami Waves in order to free up salary cap space and bring in new talent.

Fields started a few games with the Waves, but her injury made her slow and cautious. Her performance plummeted, and the Waves' reserve forward took over the starting position. Fields rode the bench for the rest of the season before being released from her contract. She signed with the Kentucky Colonels for the next two seasons as a backup to their starter, Maria Pelotas.

Last season, however, Fields began to show signs of a comeback. She stopped nursing her knee injury on the field and brought back the electric energy she was known for early in her career. Her contributions as an off-the-bench forward helped the Colonels make the playoffs and increase their ticket sales. Her jersey was also the top-selling jersey for any reserve player in the league. Fields' stats still weren't what they used to be, but her playing style and personality proved to be a lasting fan favorite.

Fields is a smart, experienced player who could drum up immediate interest in the Storm. Recently, a contingent of fans started an online campaign to bring Fields back to St. Louis, using the hashtag *#ComeHomeFields*. Signing her could generate some free media attention for the team, especially if she can continue to entertain fans on and off the field. If Fields is willing to mentor her younger teammates and proves that she can fill the stands with devoted fans, she could be the right choice.

You are hesitant to sign an older player still recovering from such a serious injury, especially since you don't know whether she'll keep playing well or if last season was just a blip in her declining performance. However, you don't have many other options. The Storm haven't secured any good trades, and no other star-caliber players have expressed interest in joining the team. You could choose to start your untested reserve forward, and depending on her performance, try to secure a better trade during the season.

You are meeting with Fields' agent today to discuss a possible contract. You don't know how much Fields made per season with the Colonels, and you aren't sure what kinds of perks the fame-loving player will request. If she's willing to play ball, you are as well. While you'd like to save as much money as possible, you are prepared to offer her a maximum of \$140,000 per season.

Prepare for your meeting with Terri Fields' agent.