

# A-LEAGUE MEN REPORT

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# SUPPORTING THE PLAYERS BUILDING THE GAME



## Professional Footballers Australia

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We also acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners and Elders past, present, and emerging throughout Australia, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, laws, and culture. They hold the memories, traditions, cultures, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.



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# FOREWORD FROM THE CO-CEOS

## Welcome to the 2022-23 PFA A-League Men Report.

In 2021, the PFA's A-League members developed a vision for a new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

Still dealing with the ongoing and profound impact of COVID-19, the players were determined to reach an agreement with the clubs that created a platform for progress.

The players undertook extensive work to develop their vision. They understood the scale of the problems facing the sport and the players and then crafted their response to overcome these challenges and seize the opportunities available.

Two years into the five-year CBA, this Report illustrates that evidence and research should be the currency we trade in when assessing the progress of the professional game.

The shadow cast by decisions such as the selling of the Grand Final had led many to opine on the end of the professional game in this country.

However, what the Report illustrates is that two things can be true at the same time. A number of big decisions have not been the right ones, but equally, the impact of the CBA on the industry has been significant and progress has been made.

With the CBA providing much needed certainty and clarity, we have seen record levels of investment in players, returns on that investment in the transfer market, enhanced contractual stability, and more opportunities for young players.

In addition, we have been provided with consistent reminders of the quality of players plying their trade in the A-League, with the likes of Mathew Leckie, Brandon Borello, and Craig Goodwin three of many who have excelled for the Socceroos against the world's best.

Whilst there remains much to do, these positive trends show how vital the partnership established through the CBA has been in ensuring opportunity, sustainable levels of investment and certainty.

As we embark on the remaining three seasons of the CBA, the players' objective is to ensure the A-League builds on this and turns into a sustained march towards a thriving professional game in Australia.

In closing, we would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our ALM members. We would also like to recognise and thank those players who have recently hung up their boots: Scott Jamieson, Nikolai Topor-Stanley, Liam Reddy, Matt Simon, Alex Wilkinson, Brad Jones, and Alessandro Diamanti. We wish them all the very best for the future.

We hope you enjoy the Report.

**Kate Gill and Beau Busch**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2022-23 A-League Men (ALM) season was headlined by record transfer receipts from international player sales of approximately \$10m, nearly triple the previous season and nearly double the previous high.

ALM clubs took in around \$3m in Club Benefits payments from FIFA for producing players who participated in the 2022 Men's World Cup which was held midway through the domestic season. Eight of the Socceroos' 26-man squad were based in the A-League at the time of the tournament.

There was also a record collective investment in player payments of \$58.8m. This eclipses the previous high of \$53.5m in 2019-20. This outcome is a sign that the league is rebounding from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and that clubs are benefiting from the certainty afforded by the long-term 2021-2026 A-Leagues Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

A drastic shift towards more stable contracting practices is another positive trend driven by the CBA. Only 45% of players were off contract in 2022-23, down from 50% in 2021-22 and 68% in 2020-21. Contractual stability is a key factor in the record transfer intake because players can only command a transfer fee if they are under contract.

The league continues to profile younger than it did a few seasons ago. For the second year running, 56% of players who made an appearance were aged 25 or under at the start of the season. This share was 35% in 2017-18. The 2022-23 Champions, Central Coast Mariners, fielded the youngest team in the league.

The trend towards youth was supported by the increased presence of Scholarship players, whose

numbers reached a new high of 84. This is nearly double the 45 in 2020-21, the last season before the new CBA which raised the limit per club from nine to 16.

Competitive balance continued to improve. Macarthur FC's 26 points represented the best total by a last-placed team since 2013-14, and the highest ever in a season with 26 or fewer rounds.

The average attendance of 7,478 was higher than the previous two pandemic-affected seasons, but not yet back to pre-pandemic levels. Adelaide United's Coopers Stadium was the players' highest-rated for both pitch quality and atmosphere among the regular home grounds across the league.

One concerning finding was that only 74% of ALM players said they would recommend their club to others in 2022-23, which was down on previous seasons, including the challenging COVID-19 period. Players assess their own clubs only, but themes which were present across multiple clubs included some detrimental environments created by the club or key staff, or a lack of professionalism in some areas such as timely provision of training schedules (which is a CBA requirement).



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# SURVEY METHODOLOGY



Where you see this symbol, the Report shares findings from the PFA's player surveys. This includes the 2022-23 A-League Men end of season player survey and small post-match surveys conducted throughout the season. 174 players responded to the end of season survey, including at least ten from each club, so the sample is representative and provides for robust comparison between subgroups. Responses were collected on a voluntary basis between 5th May and 2nd June 2023 via an online survey. Not every player responded to every question.

The results are sometimes contrasted against the A-League Women survey, which received 172 responses this season, or against previous iterations of the ALM survey.

The fact that the vast majority of the playing groups from both A-Leagues complete the survey speaks to the players' high level of engagement in their industry and provides a powerful source of information for policymakers.



# 2022 FIFA MEN'S WORLD CUP



- ▶ A-League Representation
- ▶ FIFA Club Benefits Programme
- ▶ Player Preparation

# A-LEAGUE REPRESENTATION

Eight of the Socceroos' 26-man squad for the 2022 Men's World Cup hailed from A-League Men clubs. This was a record high, eclipsing the seven domestic-based World Cup Socceroos in 2014, although squads prior to 2022 only had 23 players.

No other World Cup nations called on players from the A-League Men in 2022.

The domestic-based World Cup players were a mix of up-and-coming stars just emerging through the local game, and established veterans who have had experience abroad before returning home.

The eventual Grand Finalists, Central Coast Mariners and Melbourne City, were each home to three World Cup Socceroos at the time of the tournament, while Adelaide United and Sydney FC provided one each. Of the 26-man squad in Qatar, only six had never featured in the A-League Men.

## A-League-based World Cup Players

Club	Player
Adelaide United	Craig Goodwin
Central Coast Mariners	Jason Cummings
Central Coast Mariners	Garang Kuol
Central Coast Mariners	Danny Vukovic
Melbourne City	Mathew Leckie
Melbourne City	Jamie Maclaren
Melbourne City	Marco Tilio
Sydney FC	Andrew Redmayne





# FIFA CLUB BENEFITS PROGRAMME

FIFA distributes money to the clubs which contract players during and in the two years prior to the Men's World Cup, as compensation for their role in preparing the players to perform at the tournament.

In 2018 and 2022, this Club Benefits Programme was set at US\$209m.

The total is divided across competing players based on the number of days each player is at the tournament, from the start of the official preparation period before the first match until one day after elimination.<sup>1</sup>

In 2022, each 'player day' was worth about US\$10,950, according to FIFA. This was up from \$8,530 in 2018. With the increase to 26-man squads, the pot was diluted across more players in 2022, but the shorter preparation period meant that there were fewer player days by which to divide the total pot.

Each player's total allocation is split into three equal parts: one to the club where the player was registered during the tournament, and two to the club/s where the player was registered during the two years leading up to the tournament. It is common for one club to receive multiple parts of a player's benefits.

Other than the number of days at the tournament, there is no differentiation between, say, Lionel Messi and the third-choice goalkeeper of a team which loses all its group games. But FIFA is compelled to set the payments at a level which satisfies the largest and wealthiest clubs; the European Club Association (ECA) negotiates the quantum with FIFA on behalf of all clubs globally, despite non-European clubs having no representation through that body.

FIFA announced an uplift to US\$355m in Club Benefits for the 2026 and 2030 World Cups as part of a Memorandum of Understanding between FIFA and the ECA, which included the ECA's agreement to FIFA's proposed International Match Calendar for that period.

So, although it is not ideal that A-League clubs have no voice in the formation of the Programme, one way to frame the Club Benefits Programme is that the scale of the largest clubs distorts the value of Club Benefits to the advantage of relatively smaller clubs which provide players for the tournament. This presents a significant opportunity for A-League Men clubs.

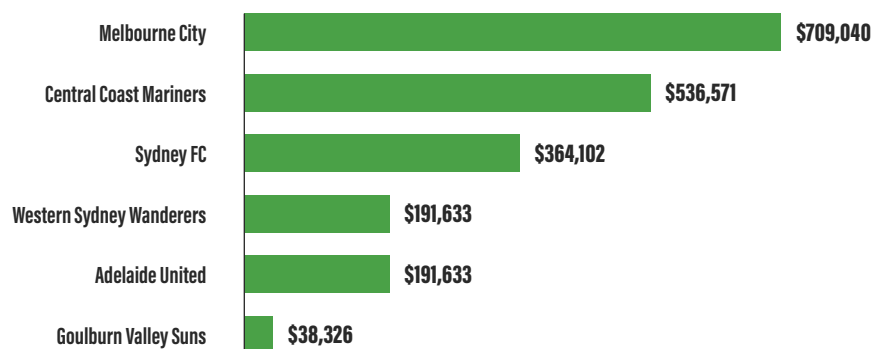
1. <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/63651247df9b8ba2/original/bxkl7wgkjygv0ar7scko-pdf.pdf>



## ALLOCATION TO A-LEAGUE CLUBS

For 2022, six Australian clubs earned a collective US\$2,031,305.<sup>2</sup> The bulk of the funds went to five ALM clubs, and Garang Kuol's former NPL club, Goulburn Valley Suns, also took in US\$38,326.

### FIFA Club Benefits 2022



Figures in USD

In 2018, seven A-League clubs were among 416 worldwide which received Club Benefits. Australian clubs then received a combined US\$1.17m, led by Melbourne City with US\$357k and Newcastle Jets with US\$297k.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the Socceroos progressed further, and the payment per player day increased, the total benefits for each Australian player were actually slightly lower in 2022 due to the condensed preparation period and the way the schedule fell. Each player generated around

US\$230k. Beating Argentina to reach the quarter-finals would have earned an extra six days in Qatar, or close to \$100k in Australian Dollars for the clubs of each player.

Not all the domestic-based World Cup players were at their ALM clubs for the full two years prior to the tournament, but on the flipside, overseas-based squad members including Nathaniel Atkinson, Kye Rowles, Mitchell Duke, Cameron Devlin, Joel King, and Keanu Baccus spent time at ALM clubs in the eligible period.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

FIFA is increasing Club Benefits to US\$355m for 2026 and 2030, while adding 16 teams to the Men's World Cup and reducing squads back to 23 players. The impact on the player-day rate is likely to be a slight increase. But the opportunity for A-League clubs is almost uniquely heightened.

Australia and New Zealand are two of the nations whose likelihood to qualify for future World Cups has most increased under the expanded format, making each of their national team players' services potentially worth around US\$300k to their clubs from 2024-2026.

The A-League is also well-placed to attract players from Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia, where the possibility of breakthrough qualifiers (through direct slots or Intercontinental Playoffs) is now real.

The scale of the Club Benefits Programme has grown to become a significant feature of the domestic club economy, not quite on the scale of the international transfer market, but similar in its uniqueness to football. Given the ALM's level of remuneration, it is possible that young squad bolters actually make more for their clubs in FIFA Benefits than they are paid in wages.

All Australian football stakeholders, from clubs, to players, to agents, and administrators, should be alive to this elevated value of national team players. Clubs should incorporate this into their strategies for developing, attracting, and retaining elite talent.

### FIFA disbursements for Men's and Women's World Cups

	2023 Women's World Cup	2022 Men's World Cup	2026 Men's World Cup
Prize Money	\$110m	\$440m	\$541m*
Club Benefits / Club Solidarity Fund	\$11.3m	\$209m	\$355m

Figures in USD

\*Calculated as FIFA's budgeted \$896m for Prize Money and Club Benefits Programme<sup>4</sup>, less the \$355m it has since agreed for CBP

2. <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/74f3450c94873e02/original/EIFA-World-Cup-Qatar-2022-Club-Benefits-Programme-Report.pdf>

3. <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/1748c00661affa91/original/z2lwlldchdrknqzror9ht-pdf.pdf>

4. <https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2022/finances/2023-2026-cycle-budget-and-2024-detailed-budget/>

# PLAYER PREPARATION

## SCHEDULING

FIFA's decision to shoehorn the 2022 World Cup into a mid-season November-December window presented a number of challenges, from player wellbeing to domestic league scheduling.

FIFPRO's pre-tournament Player Workload Journey report identified that players were afforded as few as seven days between their final club match and their first World Cup fixture.<sup>5</sup> This was in contrast with previous tournaments where players usually had closer to a month of preparation time, commonly including at least one pre-tournament practice match with their national team.

Similarly, players had to return to club football swiftly after World Cup elimination, instead of receiving an extended recovery break.

The final ALM match before its mid-season break, which featured three World Cup Socceros, was played on November 13th, nine days before the Socceros faced France in Qatar.

The ALM resumed on December 9th, the same day the quarter-finals commenced in Qatar, and six days after Australia was eliminated. FIFPRO's post-tournament report highlighted Melbourne City's Mathew Leckie among players with a particularly short turnaround between their last World Cup match and their first club match (seven days).<sup>6</sup>

This latter report revealed that 44% of World Cup players surveyed felt more physically fatigued by January 2023 than at the same stage of previous

years, and 43% felt increased mental fatigue. More than half of players had either already suffered an injury due to the congested calendar (20%) or felt more likely to do so (33%).

It is not possible to directly attribute the cause of the injury, but it bears mentioning that Leckie suffered a serious hamstring injury in late February.

Ideally, FIFA will not schedule future World Cups in the middle of an inter-year season. However, the ALM faces an immediate repeat of this dynamic in 2023-24, because the 2023 AFC Asian Cup will be held back in Qatar in January-February 2024 after China relinquished hosting rights.

The PFA recommended that the ALM should pause for the duration of the Asian Cup, but APL has taken the decision to play through. It is essential that clubs and Football Australia work together so that individual players selected for the tournament are afforded sufficient preparation and recovery time pre- and post-tournament.

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5. [https://fifpro.org/media/mo3jtev3/fifpro-pwm\\_world-cup-report-2022.pdf](https://fifpro.org/media/mo3jtev3/fifpro-pwm_world-cup-report-2022.pdf)
  6. [https://fifpro.org/media/fl5pvvck/fifpro\\_pwm23\\_posttournamentreport.pdf](https://fifpro.org/media/fl5pvvck/fifpro_pwm23_posttournamentreport.pdf)

## MATCH MINUTES

A comparative analysis of World Cup player workloads highlighted the ALM's relative deficit of match minutes by global benchmarks.

FIFPRO's pre-tournament report compared the match minutes accumulated by members of World Cup squads, and flagged Australia as having a potential collective underload going into the tournament.

Only a third of Australia's squad were based in the A-League, so it is not solely responsible for this finding. But it is true that the 2022-23 ALM, which started in October 2022, only provided six matches before the World Cup. The French top tier, Ligue Un, started two months earlier and had had 15 rounds before pausing.

Looking back further, FIFPRO found that Australia's squad had played the sixth fewest domestic league minutes between August 1st 2021 and October 24th 2022 of the 32 World Cup squads.

The average Socceroo played 2,664 such minutes during this period. This is not much less than the total minutes available in the ALM in that time, depending on whether a player's club featured in Finals matches. In terms of regional competitors, the ALM's 26-match regular season in 2022-23 is eclipsed by the 34-match J1 League and the 38-match K League 1.

The continued expansion of the ALM competition will provide an enhanced platform for clubs to develop, attract, and sustain world class players.

# EMPLOYMENT FRAMEWORK



- ▶ CBA Overview
- ▶ Player Payments
- ▶ Contracting Practices
- ▶ Player Profiles
- ▶ Player Survey

# CBA OVERVIEW

The 2022-23 season represented the second season of the 2021-2026 A-Leagues Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

There are positive signs that the five-year CBA is facilitating higher-quality A-League Men careers, with more stable contracting, increased opportunities for young players, and record player payments.

It follows that if clubs have more certainty about the employment framework in which they are operating, the scope for more strategic and long-term decision-making and investment is enhanced.

On the negative side, the end of season ALM player survey revealed that a number of clubs are failing to comply with key areas of the CBA, such as providing players with an advance schedule to enable them to plan their lives around football. The CBA prescribes mutual minimum obligations between players and clubs; it is unacceptable for either party to fall short of their side of the bargain.



## CBA adjustments for 2023-24:

At the end of each season, the PFA and APL have the opportunity to enter good faith discussions about potential enhancements to the CBA. Only minor adjustments were negotiated for the 2023-24 season, reflecting that both parties are relatively satisfied with the performance of the agreement at this moment. After these discussions, and with the agreement of players, the following CBA adjustments have been made for the 2023-24 season:

### CBA Adjustments for the 2023-24 Season

Area	Change
<b>Salary Cap Banking</b>	Return to the pre-COVID model where a club may use underspend from the previous two seasons, instead of one season, to spend over the Cap in the current season (up to 10% of the Cap)
<b>Replacement Players</b>	For outfield players to be replaced, the injury must be minimum 14 weeks (up from 12), and the injured player must satisfy minimum Designated Player criteria (to encourage clubs to promote from within where possible)
<b>National Team Exemption</b>	Clubs which have players selected for the AFC Asian Cup may have some of selected players' salary added to the Salary Cap to allow them to compensate, capped at \$150k per club



# PLAYER PAYMENTS

Total player payments reached a new high for the ALM in 2022-23, with payments totalling \$58.8m. This amounts to an average of around \$4.9m per club.

The 2021-2026 CBA saw the Salary Cap reduced in recognition of the challenges imposed on clubs by COVID-19. However, collective club investment has now exceeded pre-pandemic levels.

The investment across 12 clubs is marginally higher than the previous record spend (both as a collective and on a per club basis) during the 2019-20 season, when there was one fewer club (prior to the addition of Macarthur FC) and when the Salary Cap was \$3.2m.

The Salary Cap was \$2.55m in 2022-23, up \$50k from the first year of the new CBA. Despite this being lower than during the previous CBA, there are a number of clubs taking advantage of the flexibility afforded by designated and marquee players.

There was also a record investment in Scholarship players, whose payments are also exempt from the Cap (unless they are paid more than the stipulated minimum, in which case the difference is included in the Cap). More on them in the Contracting Practices section that follows.

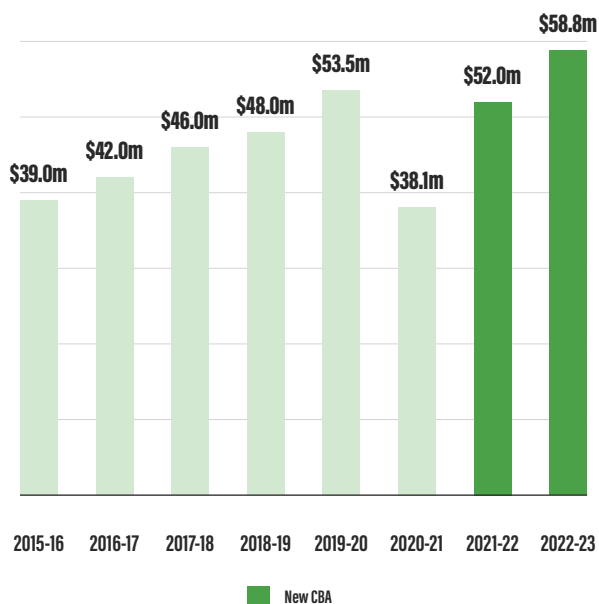
The increased utilisation of these mechanisms is an encouraging sign that clubs' businesses are rebounding after the pandemic and that competitive tension is driving investment in quality.

For 2023-24, the Cap will again rise by \$50k. Clubs will also be able to apply banking from two previous seasons, rather than one, and access concessions if their best players are called up for the AFC Asian

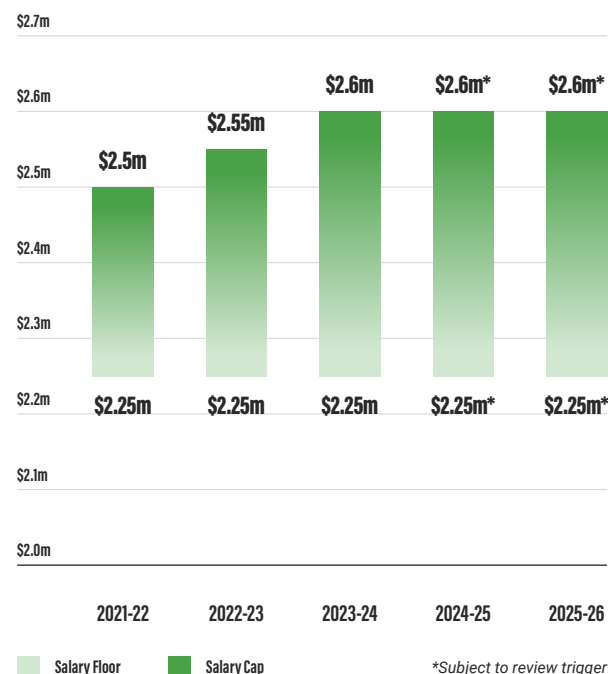
Cup (see previous section). So, it is possible that total player payments will continue to climb.

For the final two seasons of the CBA, the Salary Floor and Cap will be subject to a trigger review related to the financial performance of the competition.

**Total Player Payments**



**2021-2026 CBA Salary Cap Projections**



# CONTRACTING PRACTICES

## INCREASED STABILITY

The share of ALM players coming off contract in 2022-23 was 45%: the lowest in the nine seasons the PFA has collected data.

This figure, which represents the off-contract share around the midpoint of the season, is a notable drop from the previous average of around three in five players being in the final year of their deals each year. The share spiked at 68% in 2020-21, driven by the uncertainty associated with the pandemic.

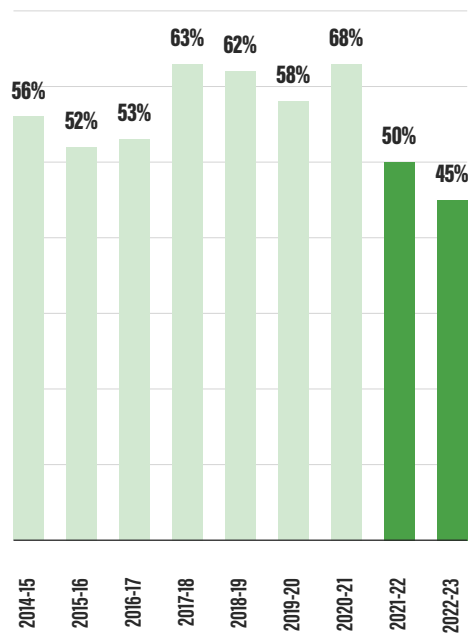
In the first season of the new CBA, 2021-22, the share fell below half (49.7%) for the first time on record, and that downward trend has continued this season.

The PFA has long highlighted the detrimental impacts on players' lives and careers of unstable contracting. For clubs, constant squad turnover can undermine on-field cohesion and the ability to connect with supporters.

Clubs can also only attract transfer fees from international clubs if their players are under contract, so the rampant practice of short-term deals eroded their ability to build value in their squads. This season's record transfer revenues, in conjunction with this increase in contract stability, proves this point.

In the past, the PFA has criticised the role of the Salary Cap in contributing to high churn rates, due to its restrictive impact on squad management. Under current settings, clubs can utilise various flexible mechanisms which accommodate both high earners and young (Scholarship) players. The evidence suggests these policies, along with the certainty provided by the long-term CBA, are enabling clubs to offer the longer-term deals which benefit them and players alike.

Share of Players Out of Contract\*



\*The share of players out of contract decreases as the season progresses and more players sign new deals. These percentages reflect the shares at around the midpoint of each season. The PFA's 2021-22 ALM Report showed the 2021-22 figure as 48%. This has been revised to 50% to reflect consistent methodology across seasons.

## INVESTMENT IN SCHOLARSHIP PLAYERS

Scholarship Players are players aged between 16 and 23 who are remunerated at minimum wage. Their payments sit outside the Salary Cap, except for any payments above the minimum.

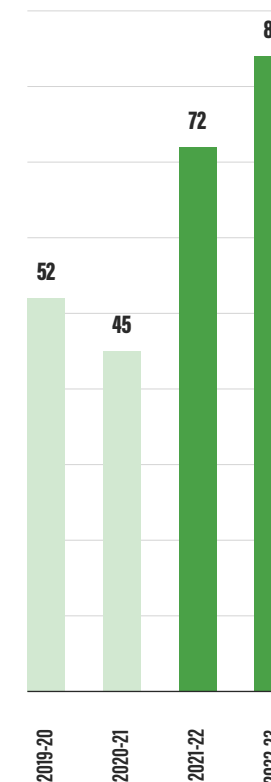
ALM clubs contracted 84 Scholarship Players in 2022-23, a record high. This is a positive reflection on clubs' willingness to invest in young players and a vindication of the regulatory intention to promote that behaviour.

The 2021-2026 CBA raised the limit of Scholarship Players to 16 per club, up from nine under the previous deal. The intention was to enable clubs to give more opportunities to young players without impacting their Cap spend, and to allow clubs to build towards a full youth roster for when a youth league is eventually re-launched.

The increased use of the Scholarship category has contributed to a youth-ward trend in the ALM's age profile in recent seasons, alongside other factors such as expansion. Player age data is analysed later in the Report.

But anecdotal examples are also powerful. For example, talented emerging players such as Nestory Irankunda, Calem Nieuwenhof, Aidan Simmons, Jordan Bos, and Cameron Cook were contracted to Scholarship deals at the start of the 2022-23 campaign. Previous Scholarship holders include the Kuol brothers, Garang and Alou, who experienced first team football in the ALM before earning transfers overseas and selection for Australian senior and U23 teams.

Scholarship Players by Season





# PLAYER PROFILES

The most notable trend in the profile of ALM players in recent seasons has been the shift towards younger players, and the 2022-23 season maintained that course.

For the second year running, 56% of players who made an appearance were aged 25 or under at the start of the season. This share was 35% in 2017-18.

The 2022-23 Champions, Central Coast, had the youngest squad by far. The average age of the players who were part of the Mariners' squad throughout the season was 22.5 years, while the next youngest squad was Adelaide United's at 24.3 years on average.

The Mariners in particular have shown that a youth-focused recruitment model is not mutually exclusive with on-field success. The club has re-established the template for a strategy centred on developing and selling talent while also winning games and connecting with the community.

The Mariners' season ran against the long-held correlation of squad stability and team success: the club had the most first-year players in 2022-23. There were homegrown success stories such as Josh Nisbet and Jacob Farrell, but they were also immediately paid back by undervalued recruits who were overlooked or discarded by other clubs.

For example, the Mariners received transfer fees for six players this season, and three of those – Nector Triantis, James McGarry, and

Sam Silvera – joined the club from ALM rivals at the start of or during the season. Another, Anthony Pavlesic, joined Central Coast's academy after coming through the youth ranks of Western Sydney Wanderers.

Other clubs will likely be assessing whether they can also further benefit from to giving opportunities to and building value in young players.

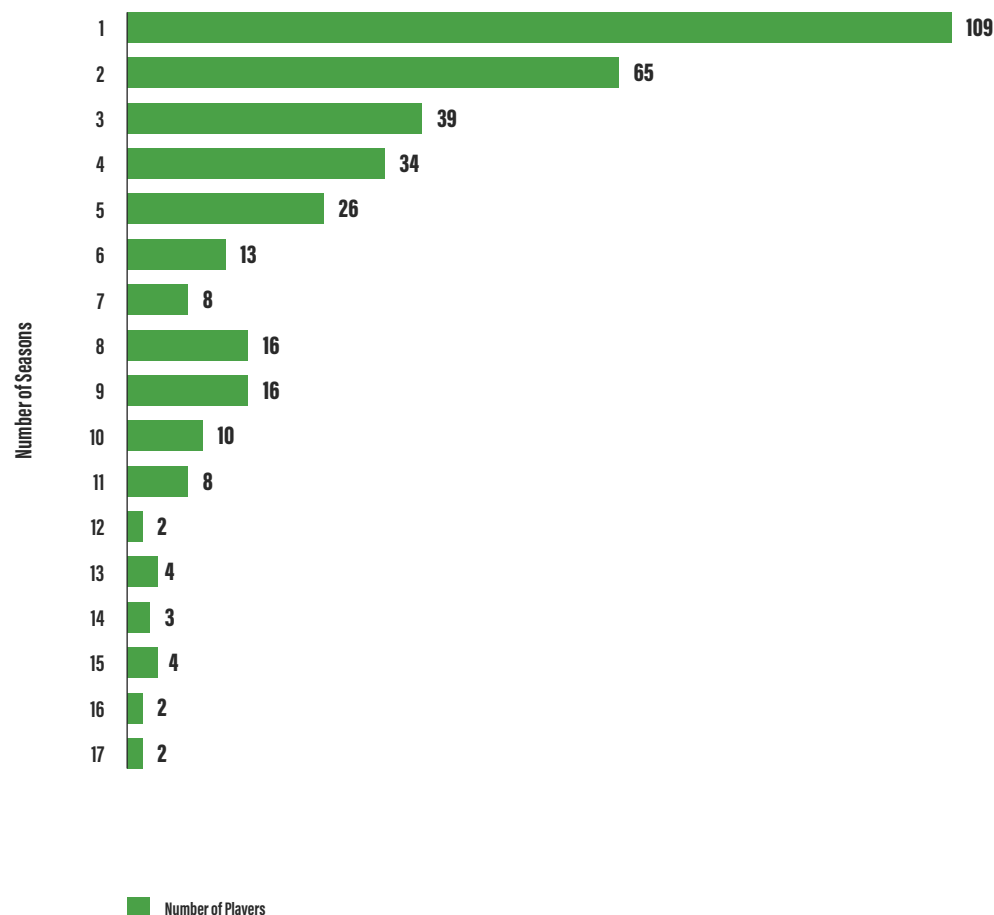
Overall, this trend bodes well for the league's function as a development pipeline for national team players and its ability to generate revenue through international transfer fees.



## 4.1

average number of seasons in the ALM

Total Number of Seasons in the ALM



# FOREIGN PLAYERS

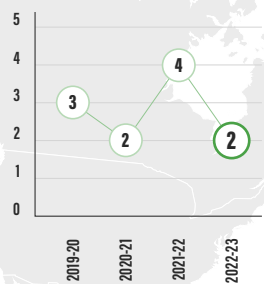


**68**  
Players

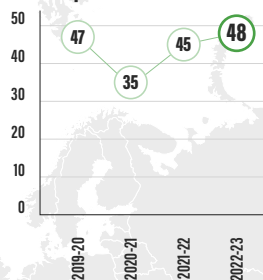


**34**  
Nationalities

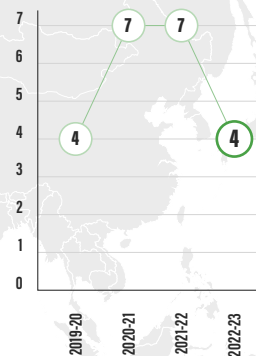
North America



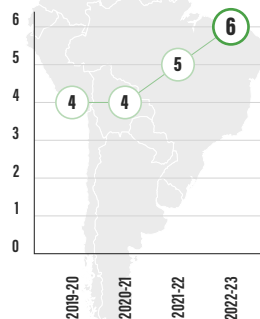
Europe



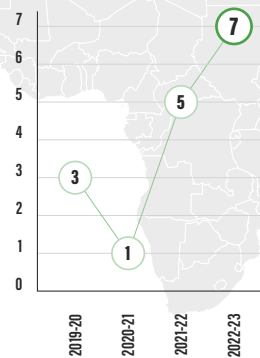
Asia



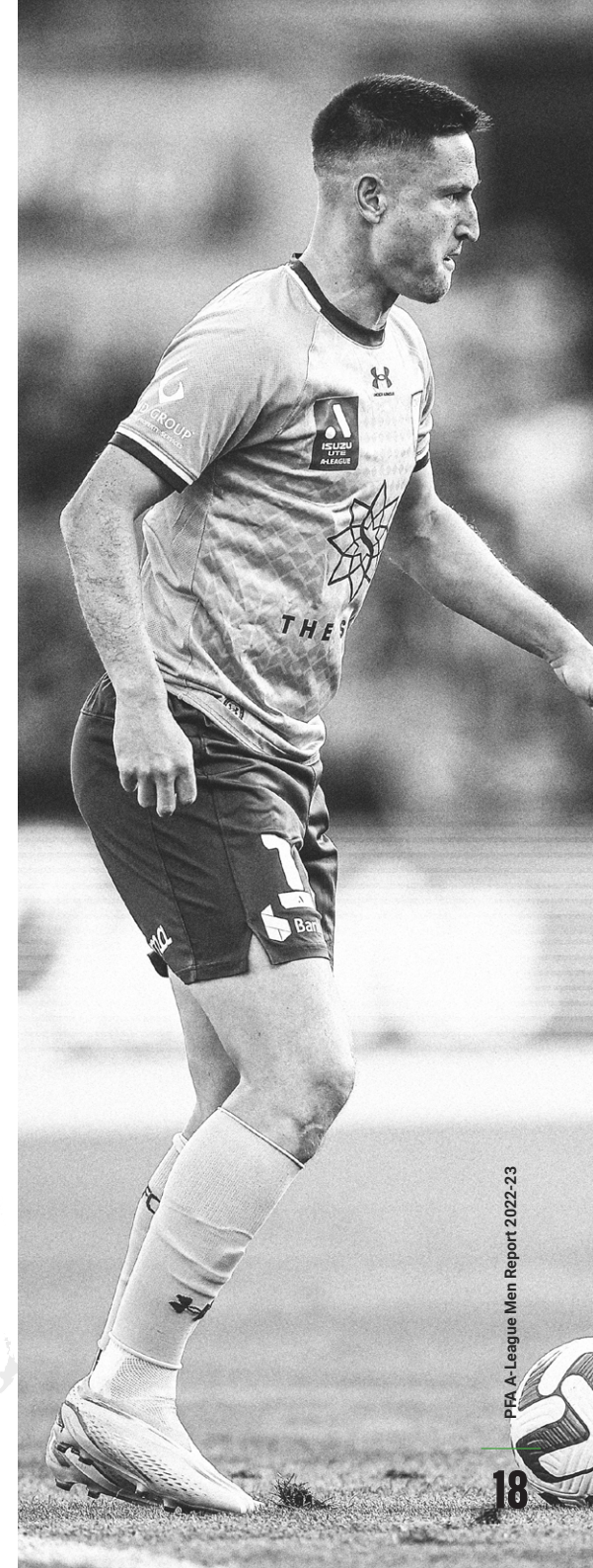
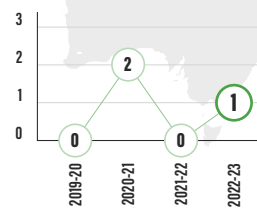
South America



Africa



Oceania



# MATCH MINUTES



**304**  
players made an appearance

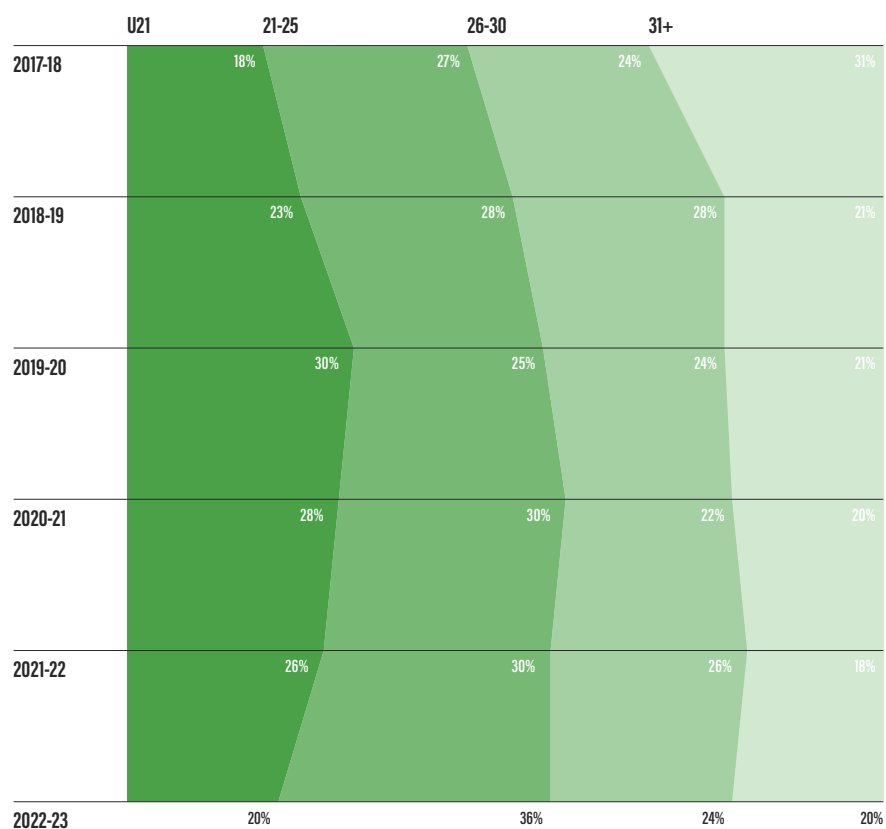


**361**  
players in squads

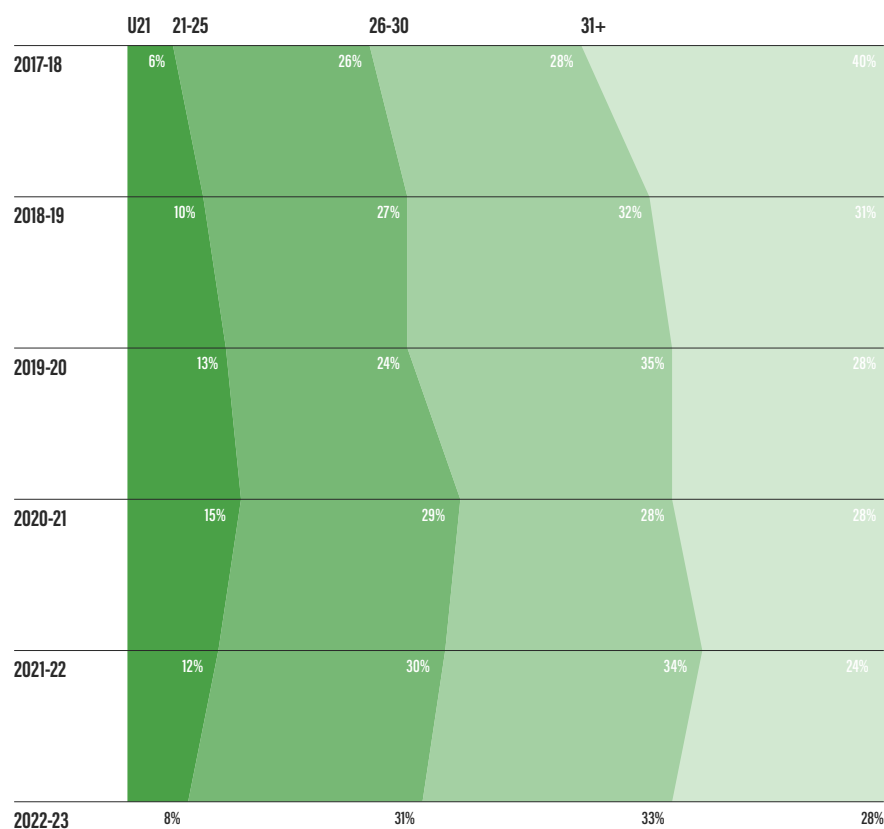


**50%**  
players in their first season at club

Players Who Made an Appearance - By Age



Share of Minutes Played - By Age

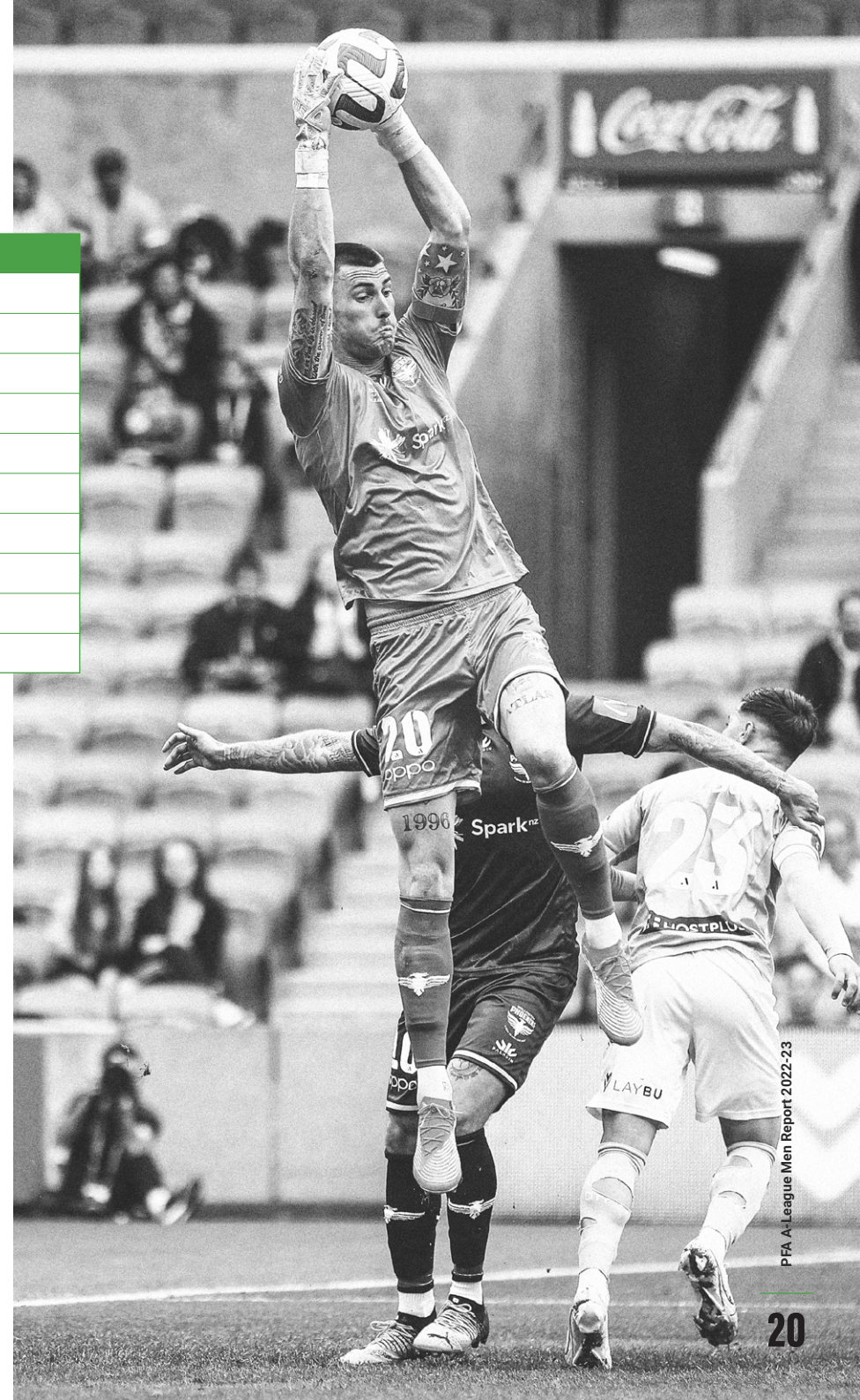


### Top Minutes Played (regular season only)

Player	Club	Age	Position	Matches	Minutes
Oliver Sail	Wellington Phoenix	26	Goalkeeper	26	2,340
Lawrence Thomas	Western Sydney Wanderers	30	Goalkeeper	26	2,340
Joe Gauci	Adelaide United	22	Goalkeeper	26	2,340
Andrew Redmayne	Sydney FC	33	Goalkeeper	26	2,340
Danny Vukovic	Central Coast Mariners	37	Goalkeeper	26	2,340
Tom Glover	Melbourne City	24	Goalkeeper	26	2,340
Jamie Maclaren	Melbourne City	29	Attacker	26	2,321
Ivan Vujica	Macarthur FC	25	Defender	26	2,315
Calem Nieuwenhof	Western Sydney Wanderers	21	Midfielder	26	2,296
Jamie Young	Western United	37	Goalkeeper	26	2,295

### Squad Stability

Club	Total Players	Players Used	First Year Players	Average Age
Adelaide United	32	27	11	24.3
Brisbane Roar	33	27	15	25.6
Central Coast Mariners	37	30	25	22.5
Macarthur FC	32	28	19	24.6
Melbourne City	29	20	10	26.0
Melbourne Victory	34	31	19	26.5
Newcastle United	26	25	14	24.5
Perth Glory	37	30	24	25.7
Sydney FC	27	23	12	26.8
Wellington Phoenix	24	21	9	25.0
Western Sydney Wanderers	34	27	22	25.5
Western United	29	27	7	27.3



# PLAYER SURVEY

## CLUB RECOMMENDATIONS

There was a concerning decline in the share of ALM players who would recommend their club to other players, a longstanding metric in the PFA's end of season player surveys.

In 2022-23, 74% of all ALM survey respondents said they would recommend their club to peers, which was down from 80% in the previous two seasons and 82% in 2019-20.

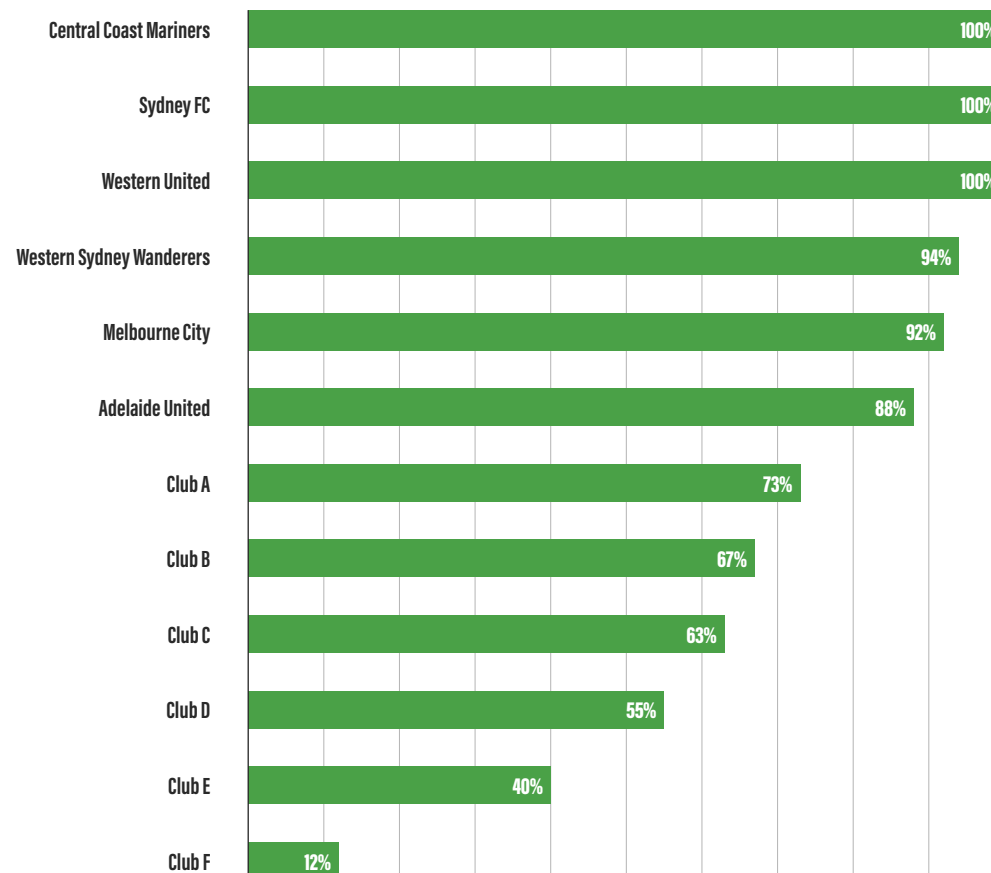
This question relates to a player's club, so the most consequential conclusions should be drawn on a club-by-club basis. The PFA is sharing specific results with every club to enable them to identify areas for improvement and drive change.

But there is also evidence of a league-wide malaise: eight of the 12 clubs experienced a decline in the share of their players who would recommend their club in 2022-23, compared to the previous season.

One of the common themes which was reported across multiple clubs was a lack of professionalism with regards to organisation and communication. A tangible example of this is a widespread failure to provide a training schedule for two months in advance, with seven days' notice of any changes, which is a CBA provision agreed to allow players to organise their lives outside of work hours.

Another reason players across several clubs did not recommend their club was the environment or culture facilitated by the club or the staff, including coaching staff.

Positive responses to this question often correlate strongly with on-field success, and that was the case again this season. The PFA has chosen not to identify all clubs in this Report, as it respectfully works through the findings with clubs and the APL, but in the interests of celebrating and incentivising success, the top six are shown. Those clubs finished 1st through 5th, and 7th, on the league table.



## LEAGUE POLICY: COMPETITION FORMAT



### Player comments on expansion

There was strong support for expanding both the number of clubs and the length of the season.

When asked about APLs stated expansion plans – described as bringing in clubs in Canberra and Auckland in 2024-25 and 'likely' another two clubs the season after – 58% of players were in support. A further 20% of players said this rate of expansion was not fast enough.

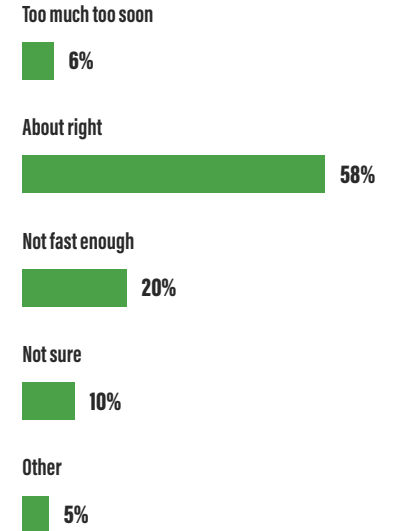
It is not surprising that players would generally be in support of more employment opportunities, but support was not universal. There were 6% of players who felt the plan was 'too much too soon', and another 5% who chose 'other' and included a written response. Those comments speak to the tension that players perceive between the quantity and quality of playing opportunities, with support for more teams offered with the caveat that those clubs are sustainable and well-supported.

One impact of expansion will be the opportunity to lengthen of the season, and this would have strong support from players. Nearly two thirds (64%) indicated the season is currently too short and a further 8% chose to write in a response, nearly all of which also said the season should be longer, with a shorter pre-season. Only 4% said the season is too long.

- “ **The league can barely sustain 12 clubs with too many games drawing next to no fans so adding an extra 2 clubs in areas which aren't known for the football community is a dangerous game** ”
- “ **Good more teams. But need strong fan bases** ”
- “ **I think they (need) to expand quickly but shouldn't make up teams, use the teams that are already established** ”
- “ **There are current clubs that are struggling and not well run. Do we persist with these clubs that have historically been poorly run or give other clubs a chance to flourish. Tough decision** ”
- “ **Need more fans** ”
- “ **More jobs for players if sustainable** ”
- “ **Two team 24/25 would be great, but to jump again with 2 more the year after could be too much too soon** ”



APL has announced that new teams will be added in Canberra and Auckland for the 2024-25 A-League Men season, with another two teams likely to be added in 2025-26. What is your opinion of this expansion plan?



# LEAGUE ASSESSMENT



- ▶ Player Movement
- ▶ Competitive Balance
- ▶ Heat & Scheduling
- ▶ Attendances
- ▶ Pitch Ratings

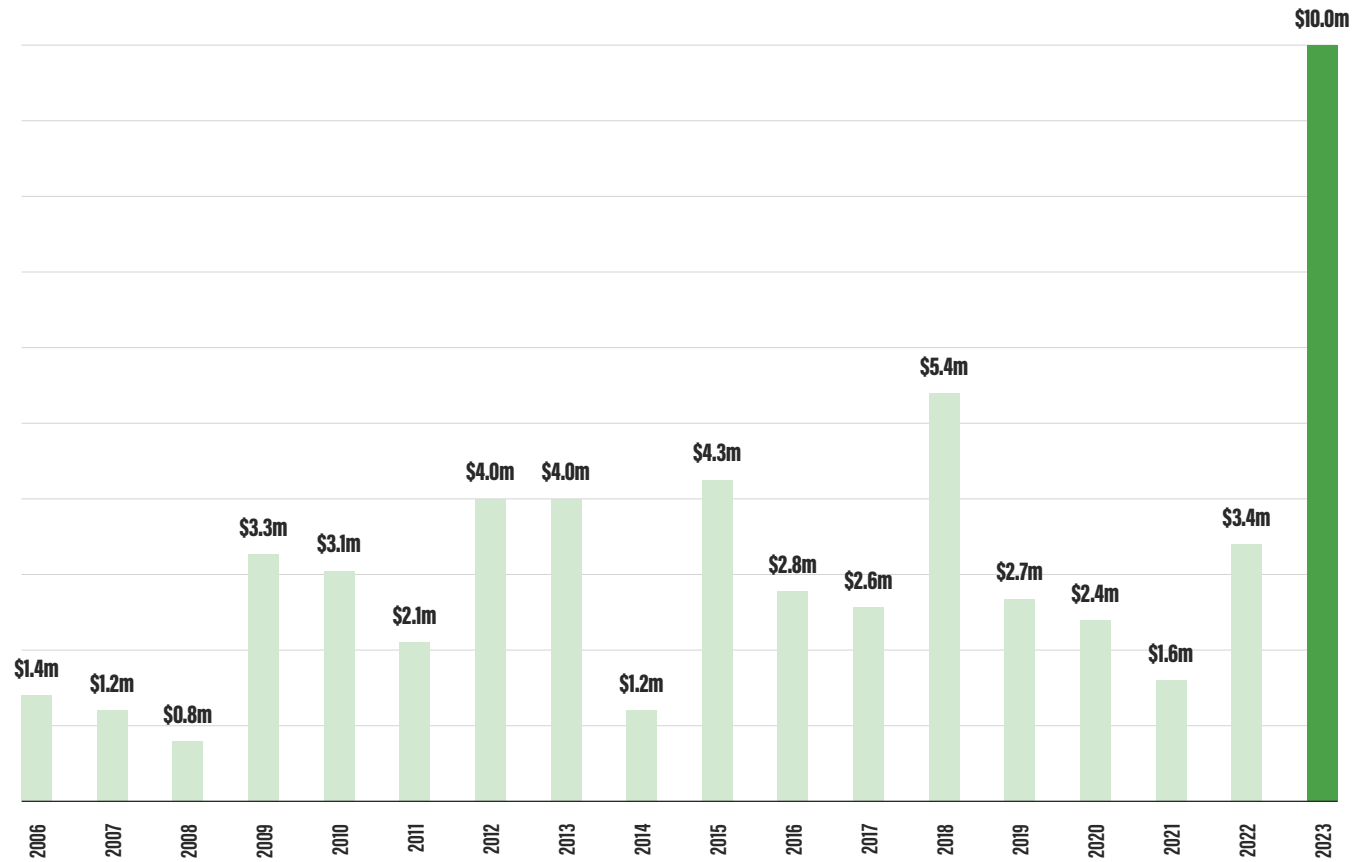
# PLAYER MOVEMENT

The 2022-23 season saw a record influx of transfer revenue for Australian clubs. PFA's analysis of transfer fees, based on a range of public and private sources, estimates that A-League clubs received about \$10m across the mid-season and off-season windows for 14 player sales.

This collective take is nearly double the previous high, \$5.4m in 2017-18, and nearly triple the \$3.4m received in 2021-22.

The \$10m estimate does not include the value of any additional clauses such as a percentage of any future transfer fee.

**Australian International Transfer Receipts (AUD \$)**



**Note:** All figures from FIFA Transfer reports except 2023, which is PFA's estimate based on public and private sources



This result is a financial boon for the competition. Only time will tell if the quantum is a one-off spike or reflective of a new normal. However, from a policy perspective, we do not have the luxury of waiting before drawing loose conclusions to inform actions today.

The first point to acknowledge is that this outcome was achieved under existing policy settings. It has been said that the league must adopt an internal transfer market for it to generate significant net transfer revenue. This evidence undercuts that argument.

Rather, an analysis of the players sold suggested that a range of interconnected factors have driven this outcome:

#### Younger players:

In the Player Profiles section of this Report, the ALM's trend towards youth is analysed. More opportunities for younger players mean more opportunities for breakthrough talents to earn overseas moves.

#### Longer contracts:

In the Contracting Practices section of this Report, the trend towards more stable contracting is highlighted. Players must be under contract to command a transfer fee, so it follows that a greater share of players under contract means that an in-demand player is less likely to leave for free.

#### International success:

The Socceroos' best-ever Men's World Cup result and Ange Postecoglou's rapid ascent at Celtic may have directly and indirectly increased interest in ALM players. The selection of ALM players for Qatar obviously enhanced their individual profiles, but the success of Australian players and coaches on the global stage also reflects well on their countrymen more generally, and draws clubs' attention to our competition as a source for talent. Hearts and Middlesbrough both had World Cup Socceroos on their books before dipping back into the A-League market which produced those players.



These factors arguably drove the record transfer receipts, but what drove these factors?

#### Aligned CBA framework:

The agreement of the five-year 2021-2026 A-Leagues CBA has allowed clubs to plan for the longer-term, facilitating more multiyear deals which protect the value of players. The expansion of the Scholarship Player roster has enabled clubs to provide more opportunities to young players without stressing the salary cap.

#### Strategic clubs:

Clubs are also getting better at executing on this front, including smarter recruitment and succession planning, more faith in youth, and leveraging international networks to find buyers.

#### Youth quality:

Hopefully, the trends towards younger players and higher transfer receipts are indicative of a better class of Australian prospects coming through. If this does prove to be the case, it could be due to a combination of factors such as maturing club academies and revitalised youth national teams. Time will tell.

#### ALM expansion:

Adding Western United and Macarthur over recent seasons had the effect of redistributing the senior talent pool, which forced clubs to provide more game time to emerging players.



To illustrate these points in combination, consider the example of Jordan Bos. He joined Melbourne City's academy at age 13 in 2016. Midway through the 2020-21 season, City was able to offer him his first Scholarship deal.

Before the 2021-22 season, City released one of two senior left fullbacks, Ben Garuccio, to Western United, leaving Bos as the sole understudy to Scott Jamieson and extending Bos' Scholarship contract for three years. During 2022-23, Bos was able to secure a first-team shirt and earn his record-breaking move.

A-League club academies have room for improvement, but it is impossible to judge their output without the benefit of time. Bos is among the first generation of players to emerge from this pathway having been in the system from a young age. Credit also goes to his club for managing his onramp into the first team, while making full use of the regulatory levers which were designed to support such a process.

#### International Transfers of ALM Players Involving a Transfer Fee in 2023

Player	Age (at 1/7/23)	Club From	Club To
Craig Goodwin	31	Adelaide United	Al-Wehda
Sam Silvera	22	Central Coast Mariners	Middlesbrough
Nector Triantis	20	Central Coast Mariners	Sunderland
Jason Cummings	27	Central Coast Mariners	Mohun Bagan
Garang Kuol	18	Central Coast Mariners	Newcastle United (UK)
James McGarry	25	Central Coast Mariners	Aberdeen
Anthony Pavlesic	17	Central Coast Mariners	Bayern Munich
Marco Tillio	21	Melbourne City	Celtic
Jordan Bos	20	Melbourne City	Westerlo
Nick D'Agostino	25	Melbourne Victory	Viking
Keegan Jelacic	20	Perth Glory	Gent
Patrick Yazbek	21	Sydney FC	Viking
Kusini Yengi	24	Western Sydney Wanderers	Portsmouth
Calem Nieuwenhof	22	Western Sydney Wanderers	Hearts

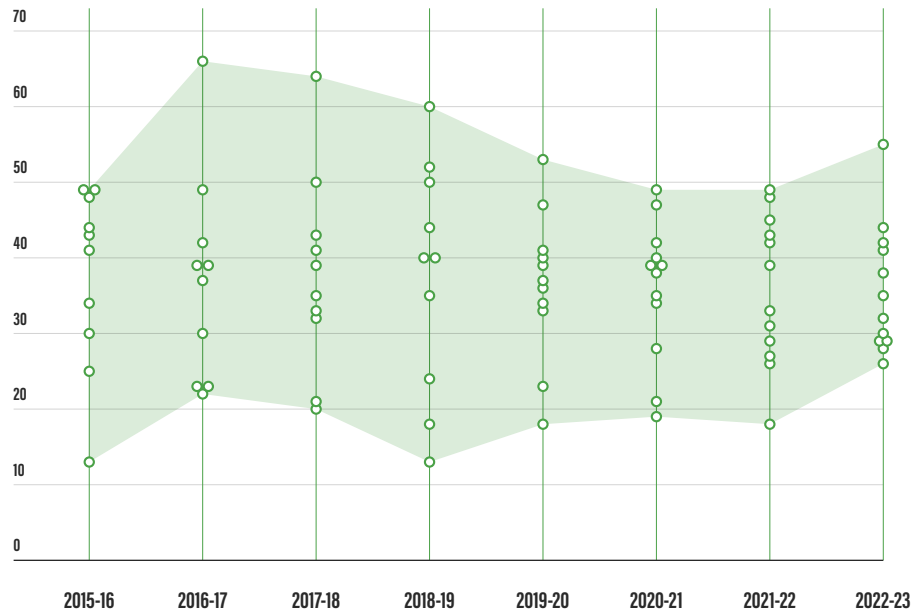


# COMPETITIVE BALANCE

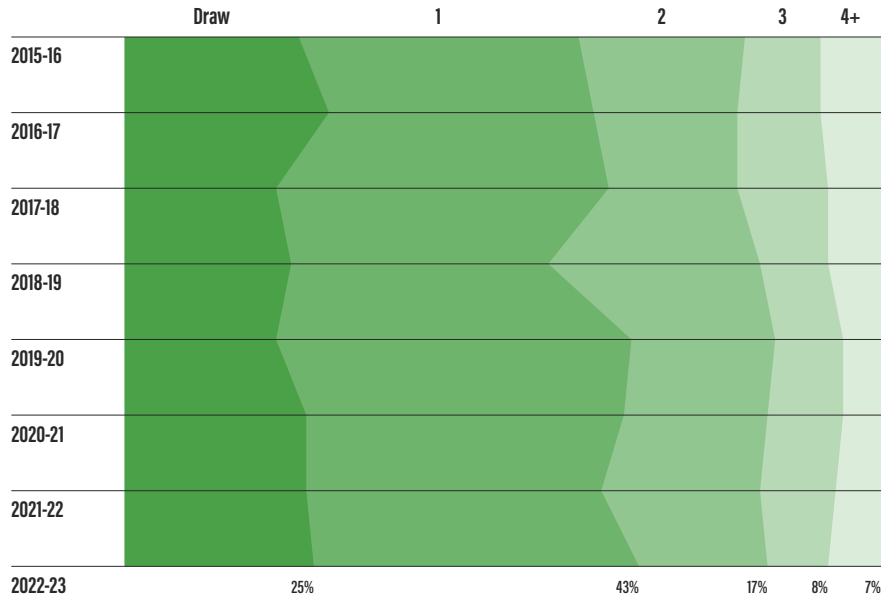
Macarthur FC's 26 points represented the best total by a last-placed team since 2013-14, and the highest ever in a season with 26 or fewer rounds.

It might be cold comfort for Macarthur, but from the league's perspective, it does continue a trend towards greater competitive balance in recent seasons.

Points Spread Comparison



Goal Margins



# ATTENDANCES

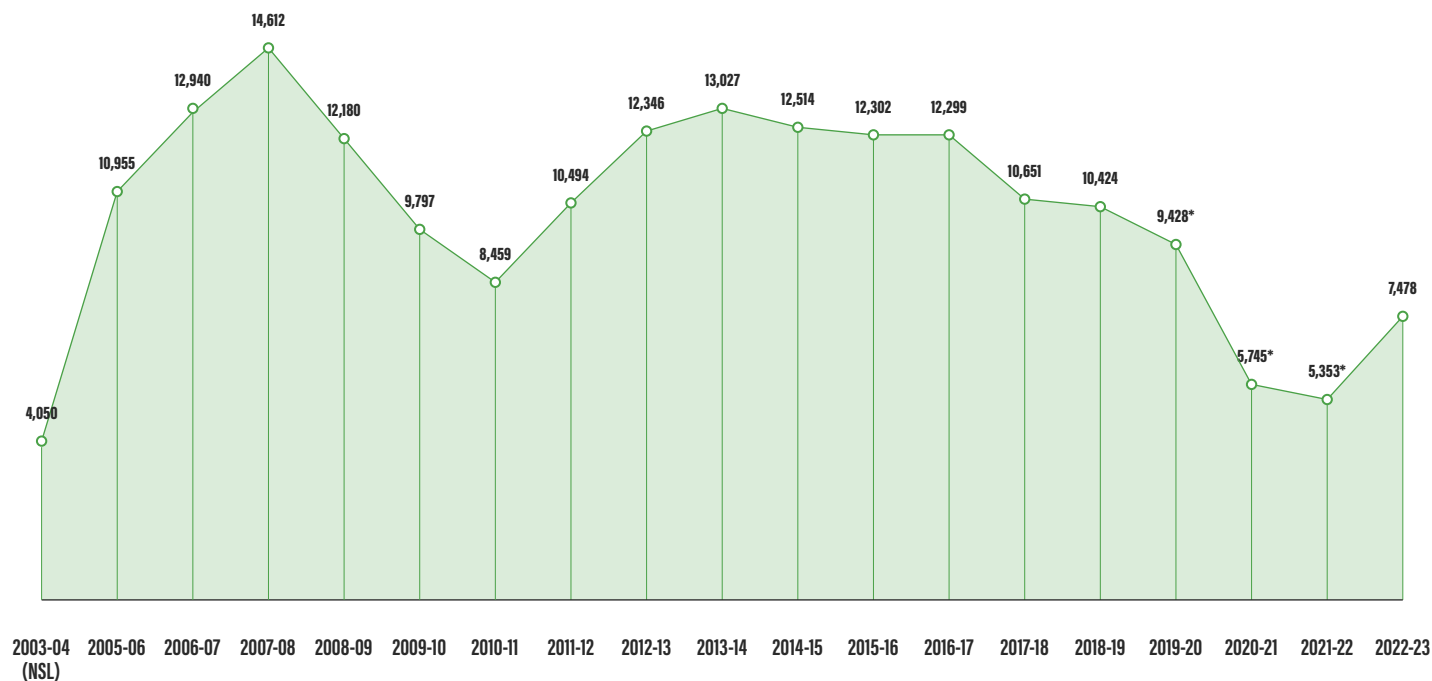
The 2022-23 season was the first in four years not directly impacted by COVID-19, although it is too early to discern whether the pandemic is having a lasting indirect impact on this or other sporting leagues.

In the end of season player survey, the PFA asked players for their top two priorities for increasing ALM attendances, and provided a list of ten suggestions with an option to write in a different response.

The most selected options, as shown in the chart on the next page, were generally to do with the visibility, promotion, and presentation of the league and games. The lesser selected options were generally to do with the match experience and the football product.

A broad but fair conclusion would be to state that the players feel that the league is providing compelling entertainment for those who follow it, but that the issue lies with gaining exposure to a broader audience.

Average ALM Attendances (Regular Season)



\* Attendances affected by COVID-19



What are the top two things you think are most important to improve to increase A-League Men attendances?

Marketing / promotion of games



Broadcast of games



Management of the league in general



Media coverage



Treatment of fans



Ticket affordability



Management of clubs in general



Match venues



Quality of profile / players



Quality / style of football



Other



# PITCH RATINGS

The PFA A-League Men Pitch Ratings are provided by selected away team players after each match. Players rate the playing surface on four measures: pace, hardness, smoothness and overall quality. Pace and hardness are measured on a scale where the ideal score sits at the middle, while smoothness and overall quality are simply scored from one to five. The players also rate the atmosphere during the match.

Coopers Stadium in Adelaide was rated the best atmosphere in the league with an average score of 4.8 on a scale of one to five. It also had the best surface of all the league's regular home grounds, with a score of 4.5 (Mars Stadium, where Western United hosted three matches, scored a perfect 5.0 for pitch quality).

Stadium	Home Club	Overall Pitch Quality	Atmosphere
AAMI Park	Melbourne City	★★★★★	★★★★★
AAMI Park	Melbourne Victory	★★★★★	★★★★★
AAMI Park	Western United	★★★★★	★★★★★
Allianz Stadium	Sydney FC	★★★★★	★★★★★
Campbelltown Sports Stadium	Macarthur FC	★★★★★	★★★★★
Central Coast Stadium	Central Coast Mariners	★★★★★	★★★★★
Central Energy Trust Arena	Wellington Phoenix	★★★★★	★★★★★
CommBank Stadium	Western Sydney Wanderers	★★★★★	★★★★★
Coopers Stadium	Adelaide United	★★★★★	★★★★★
Eden Park	Wellington Phoenix	★★★★★	★★★★★
Glen Willow Regional Sports Stadium	Central Coast Mariners	★★★★★	★★★★★
HBF Park	Perth Glory	★★★★★	★★★★★
Kayo Stadium	Brisbane Roar	★★★★★	★★★★★
Macedonia Park	Perth Glory	★★★★★	★★★★★
Mars Stadium	Western United	★★★★★	★★★★★
McDonald Jones Stadium	Newcastle Jets	★★★★★	★★★★★
Moreton Daily Stadium	Brisbane Roar	★★★★★	★★★★★
Sky Stadium	Wellington Phoenix	★★★★★	★★★★★
Suncorp Stadium	Brisbane Roar	★★★★★	★★★★★
UTAS Stadium	Western United	★★★★★	★★★★★
WIN Stadium	Macarthur FC	★★★★★	★★★★★

# PLAYER DEVELOPMENT



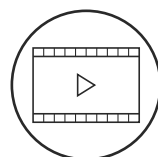
- ▶ Impact
- ▶ Career & Transition

# PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT

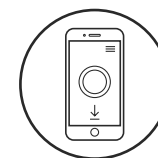
Through the CBA, the players agree with APL for funds to be invested into supporting players off the pitch through the PFA Player Development Program. Aiming to support PFA members in relation to their wellbeing, career, and to prepare for their playing retirement, the Program continues to see unprecedented growth and enjoys high levels of player satisfaction.



**80**  
education grants  
allocated to ALM players



**51**  
highlights packages  
produced for ALM  
players



**65**  
ALM players attended  
PFA Red Button and  
Match Fixing workshops



**256**  
ALM players attended  
PFA pre-season  
presentations



**65**  
ALM players attended  
PFA concussion  
workshops



## Satisfaction with the Player Development Program



■ Extremely Dissatisfied
 ■ Slightly Dissatisfied
 ■ Slightly Satisfied
 ■ Extremely Satisfied

Note: N/A excluded



# CAREER & TRANSITION

The share of players working a job other than playing fell by half to 15% after spiking during the pandemic. Similarly, the share studying while playing fell to a pre-pandemic normal of 40%.

Other than a handful of young players, A-League Men players who are working while playing are more likely to do it out of choice rather than financial necessity. This is in contrast to A-League Women players who often have to work a second or third job to sustain themselves financially.

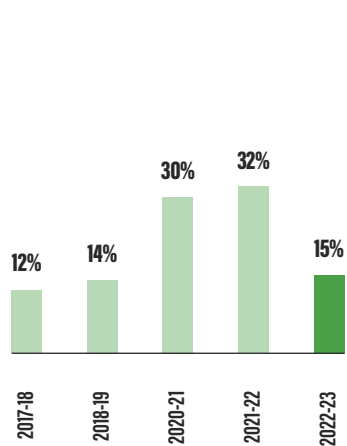
Of A-League Men players who perform other work, 93% commit only between one and ten

hours per week to that other endeavour, making it manageable to handle.

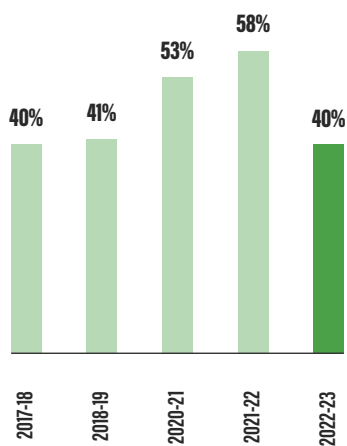
So, while A-League Women players report that it is increasingly difficult to balance their football and work commitments, for A-League Men players, working while playing is regarded by players as more like studying while playing: on average, it is linked with an improved sense of balance now and a positive impact on feelings of preparedness for life after football, compared to neither studying nor working.



## Activities during the season\* Work:



## Study:



\*Question not asked in 2019-20

## In general, how prepared do you feel for life after football?

### Working



### Studying



### Not working or studying



## How satisfied are you with your current balance between football/work/study/life?

### Working



### Studying



### Not working or studying



***COURAGE***  
***WORLD CLASS***  
***INTELLIGENCE***  
***TRUST***  
***RESPECT***



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