



# RETIRED AND TRANSITIONED PLAYERS REPORT



2021

# SUPPORTING THE PLAYERS BUILDING THE GAME

## Professional Footballers Australia

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## Indigenous Recognition

The PFA acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

# CONTENTS

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<b>04</b>	FOREWORD
<b>06</b>	ABOUT THE STUDY
<b>07</b>	SNAPSHOT OF RESPONDENTS
<b>08</b>	SURVEY SUMMARY
<b>09</b>	HEALTH AND WELLBEING
<b>10</b>	TRANSITION SUMMARY
<b>11</b>	EMPLOYMENT STATUS
<b>12</b>	FINANCIAL STATUS
<b>13</b>	FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS
	GIVING BACK TO THE GAME
<b>14</b>	PAST PLAYERS' ADVICE
<b>15</b>	PFA ACTION PLAN



# FOREWORD

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## Beau Busch

Co-Chief Executive  
Professional Footballers Australia



## Kathryn Gill

Co-Chief Executive  
Professional Footballers Australia

***“When you are reading the fairytale, you don’t get the real ending; what happens next after football. I was getting up in the morning, having a shower and getting dressed and I had nowhere to go. I was a bit lost.”***

In 2012, just three years after realising his childhood dream of playing for the Socceroos, Roddy Vargas was unexpectedly released by Melbourne Victory, marking the end of his career in the A-League.

Vargas’ experience is one that has been shared by many former professional players, with the PFA’s Retired and Transitioned Players Report published in 2015 illustrating that the Victory legend was not alone in facing a challenging transition from the sport.

The majority of players from that study rated their transition as difficult; one in three players described their retirement as involuntary, many had long lasting physical ailments post football and one in five experienced mental health problems.

The struggles of past players forced the game to reflect on whether it was doing enough to adequately support the people so central to the sport. The evidence was clear that it wasn’t.

In response, the game took action, and through the 2015 Whole of Game Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) football prioritised the off-field development and support of our professional players.

The impact has been significant. More and more players have accessed wellbeing support and record numbers of players have engaged in off field development in the past six years to further their lives off the pitch.

The game saw spectacular success stories emerge. Tim Brown, a PFA Scholarship recipient, built a multi-million-dollar shoe company. Matildas such as Clare Polkinghorne and Elise Kellond-Knight carved out international success for Australia while gaining Masters degrees.

Countless others have benefited from career counselling, education grants, mental health resources and new programs to equip themselves for the inevitability of transition.

This shift demonstrated the remarkable potential of our players to excel not only on the pitch but off it. Equally, the game demonstrated that players face the same challenges as those in the broader community and underlined the importance of ensuring adequate support.

Whilst we have made progress, the 2021 PFA Retired and Transitioned Players Report illustrates that we are yet to adequately address the challenges faced by our players in retirement.

In the process of conducting this research, we asked various players about their individual experience. Alarming, the feedback again mirrored Vargas':

***"I planned ahead and knew what I wanted to do, and it was still tough. Lots of players didn't and they are still lost years after retirement."***

The statistics also reinforce the players' anecdotes. Over two thirds of respondents rated their transition as difficult to very difficult, just 30% secured employment immediately following their football careers and 41% rated the support received after transition as very low.

In response to these findings, the PFA is launching the PFA Past Players Program. Building on the progress made by the PFA's Player Development Program, which aims to provide world class development opportunities and support to current players, the Past Players Program is the result of the current generation's commitment to ensuring the contribution of those who came before them is acknowledged and that they supported in their lives after football.

Through the program the PFA is committed to ensuring all past players have access to expert support in the areas of career and wellbeing and that they remain connected to the game long after their professional careers have come to an end.

The Past Players Program is an important step forward, but there remains much to do if we are to build it into a world class program that is embedded into Australian football. Our aim is to work in partnership with Football Australia and the Australian Professional Leagues. We have been encouraged by the initial discussions that there is a strong will to collectively advance the program.

For 27 years our members have advanced the interests of the game through a deep commitment to the sport and each other. Now the time has come to take another important step forward and recognise, support and acknowledge our past players who have contributed so much to Australian football.

# ABOUT THE STUDY

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Professional Footballers Australia (PFA) commissioned the study with the underlying objectives to:

1. Gain a clearer picture of what life is like post football for players;
2. Take this knowledge and build appropriate support programs for retired and transitioned players; and
3. Capture the insights and experiences of past players to better equip the current generation to excel during their careers and prepare adequately for life after football.

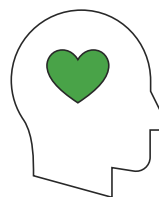
The study and data collection was overseen by FIFPRO Chief Medical Officer Vincent Goutteborge with the report produced by the PFA. The survey consisted of 61 questions and explored themes such as:



**RETIREMENT**



**EDUCATION**



**WELLBEING**



**FINANCES**



**CURRENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE GAME**

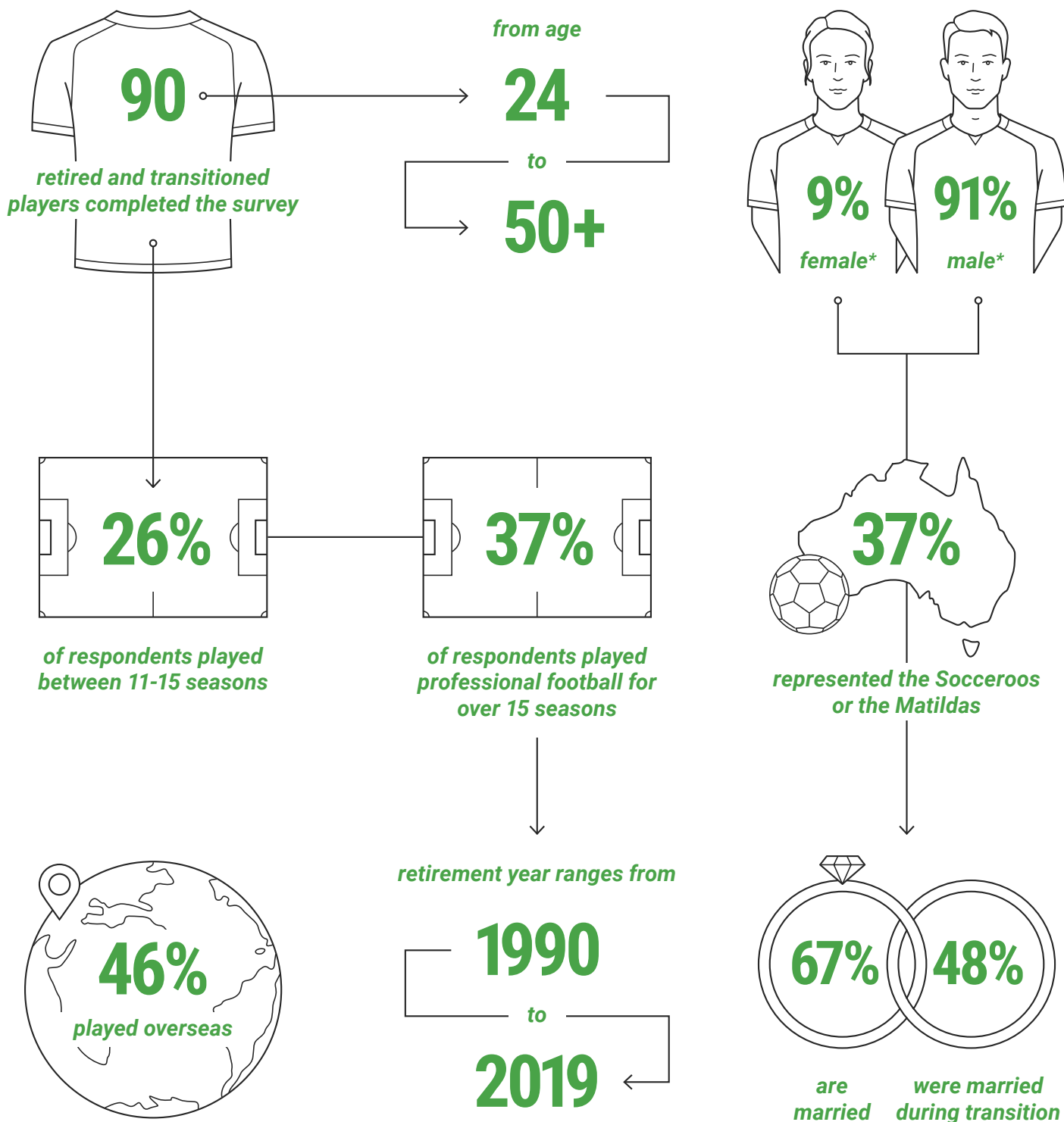


**ADVICE FOR THE CURRENT GENERATION OF PLAYERS**



**FIFPRO**  
**FOOTBALL**  
**PLAYERS**  
**WORLDWIDE**

# SNAPSHOT OF RESPONDENTS



\*Respondents were eligible if they classified as professional footballers, with the disparity between genders reflecting the historical split in Australian footballers identified as 'professional'. Monitoring the transition and retirement experiences of our female members is a strategic priority for the PFA.



**KEY CHALLENGES:**

# SURVEY SUMMARY

The major reasons for finding transition difficult was



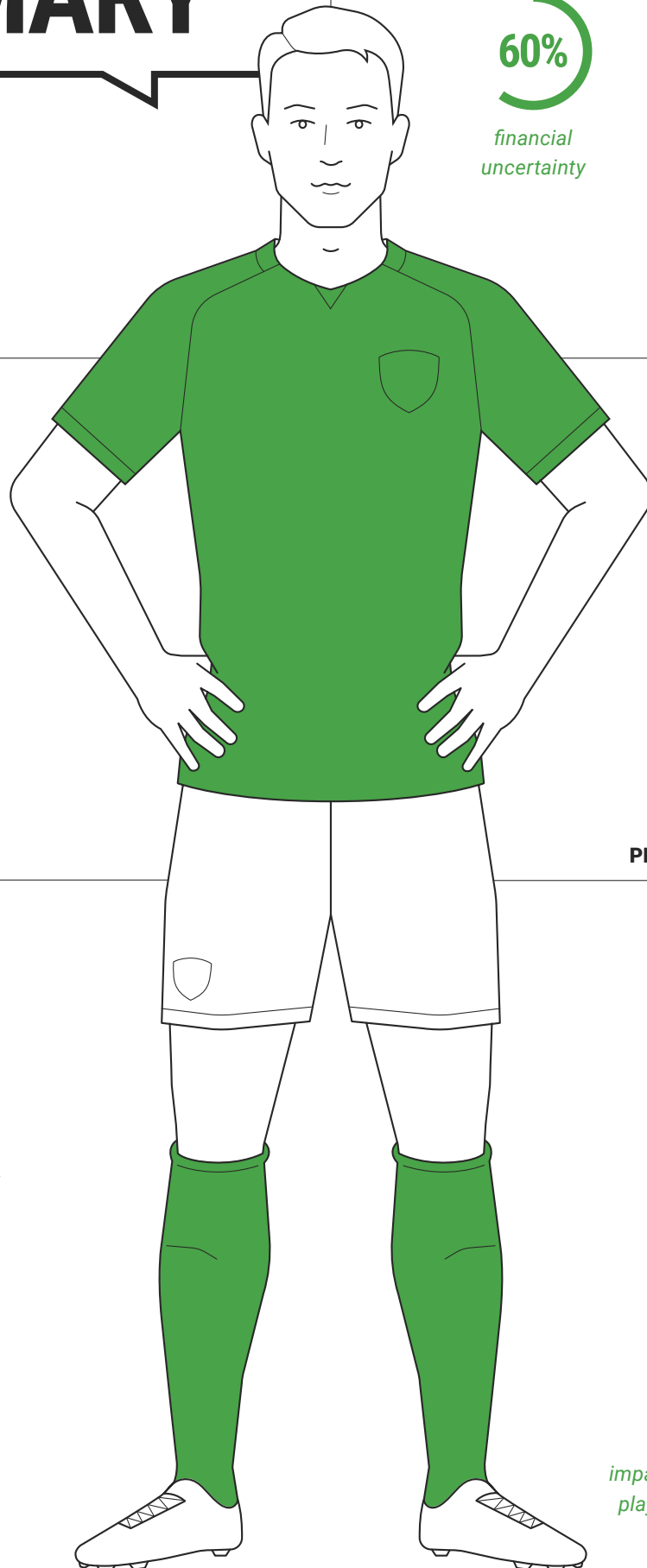
financial uncertainty



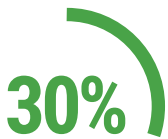
loss of identity



missing the competitiveness



**EMPLOYMENT:**



of players gained employment immediately following their careers



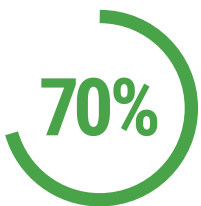
**SUPPORT:**



of players rated the support received after transition as very low



**TRANSITION:**



of past players rated their transition as difficult to very difficult



**PRE-RETIREMENT PLANNING:**



of players did not engage in pre-retirement planning



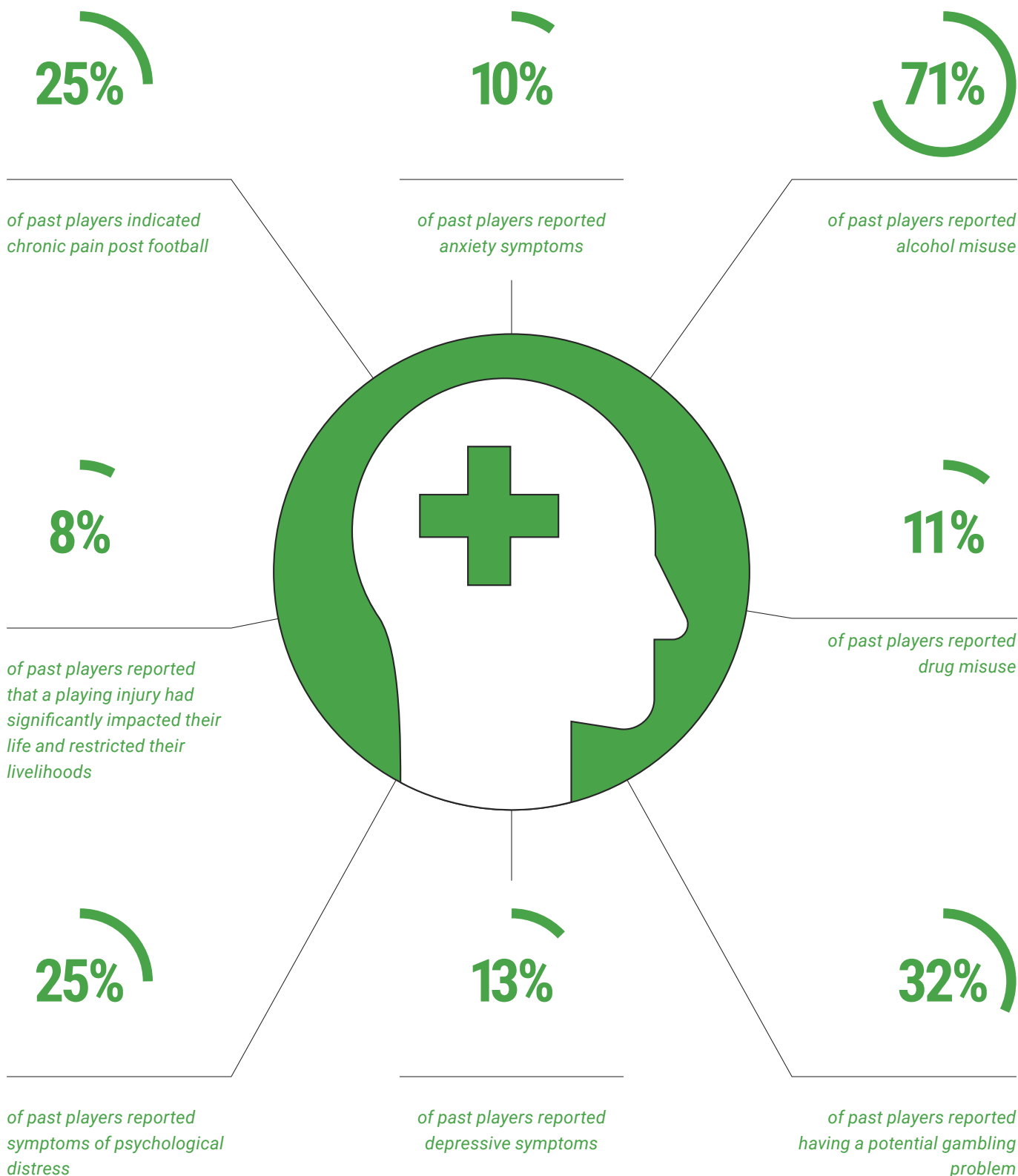
of players wanted to continue to play football at the time of retirement



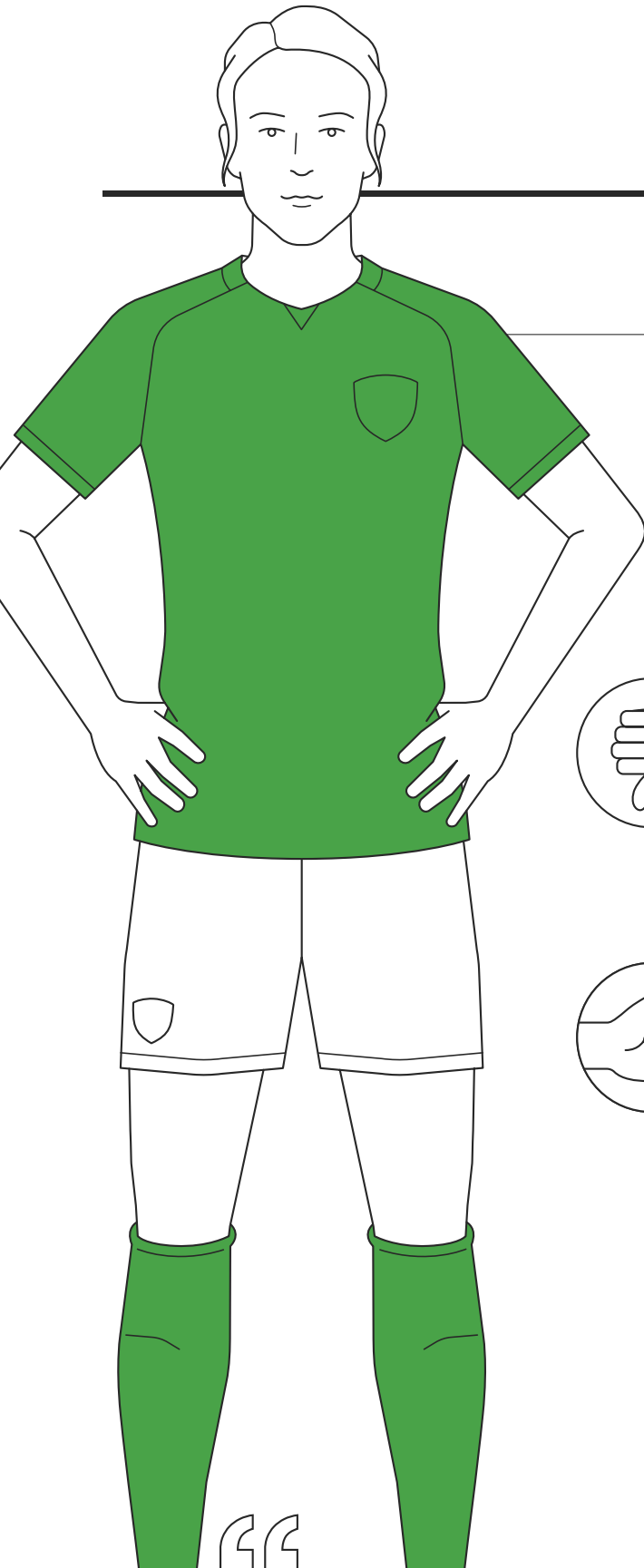
of players said if they could impart a key learning onto current players it would be to work on an alternative career pathway



# HEALTH AND WELLBEING



# TRANSITION SUMMARY



70%

of past players rated their transition as difficult to very difficult

80%

of players who described their retirement as involuntary rated their transition as difficult to very difficult

## Key reasons why many found it so difficult:

- Felt a loss of identity
- Financial uncertainty
- Missing the competitiveness of elite sport
- Wanted to keep playing football
- Career transition challenges

## Key reasons why some transitioned easily or somewhat easily:

- Developed a transition plan whilst playing
- Had a well developed social and support network away from football
- Had employment secured
- Up-skilled in preparation for retirement

56%

of past players described their retirement as involuntary

31%

of past players retired due to injury

“  
I planned ahead and knew what I wanted to do and it was still tough. Lots of players didn't and they are still lost years after retirement. It needs to be valued by clubs otherwise the message to players during their careers is that the only thing that matters is playing.”

- past player on transition

# EMPLOYMENT STATUS

47%

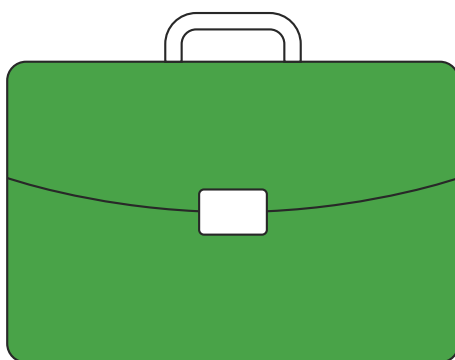
*of past players were not in satisfying employment 12 months post retirement*

23%

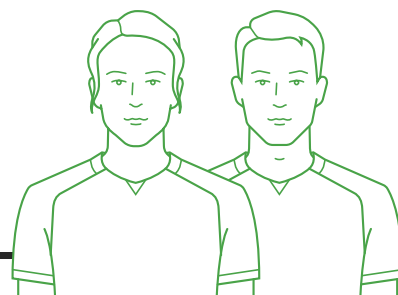
*of past players were unable to find any type of employment 6 months post retirement*

70%

*of past players who rated their transition as very difficult were not in satisfying employment 12 months post retirement*



# FINANCIAL STATUS



*Past players who involuntarily retired were more likely to be dissatisfied with their financial situation.*

7%

*of past players were financially secure from their playing income*

13%

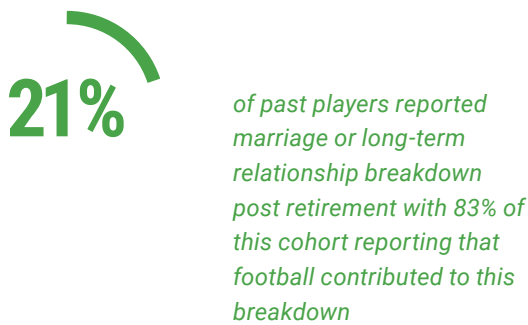
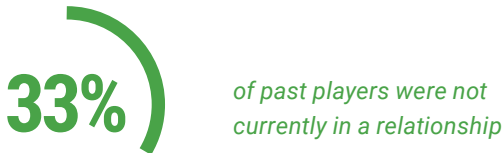
*were concerned about their finances*

4%

*were suffering significant financial distress*



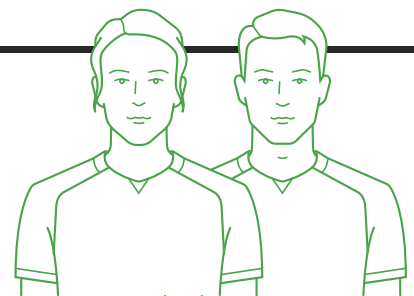
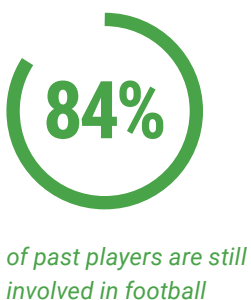
# FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS



*The down times in my football career severely affected my mood and therefore my relationship. The transition to life after football had a devastating impact on me and my relationship. I felt depressed, helpless and insecure. My partner was very supportive but I created a very tense environment and forced our break up. I was too proud to admit something was wrong and I was hurting.*

- past player on their relationship breakdown post football

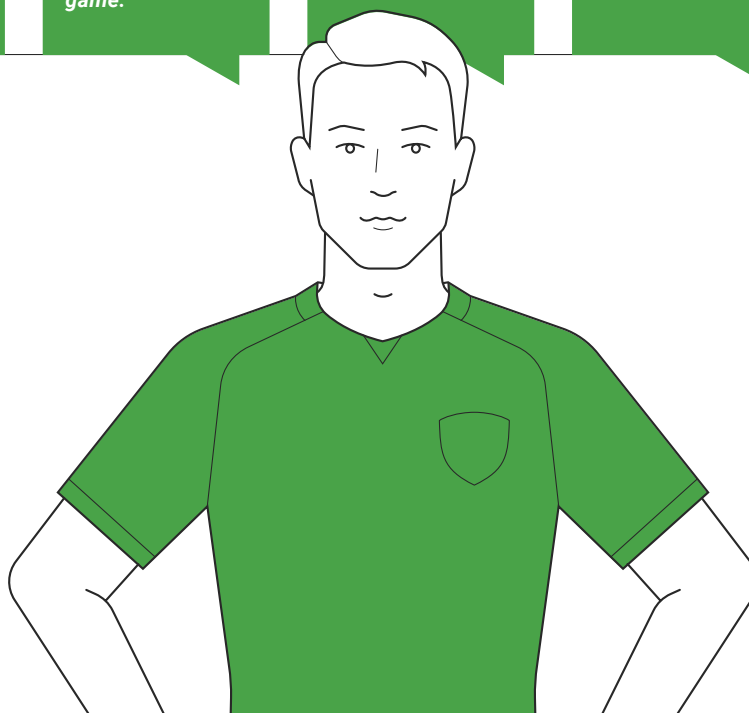
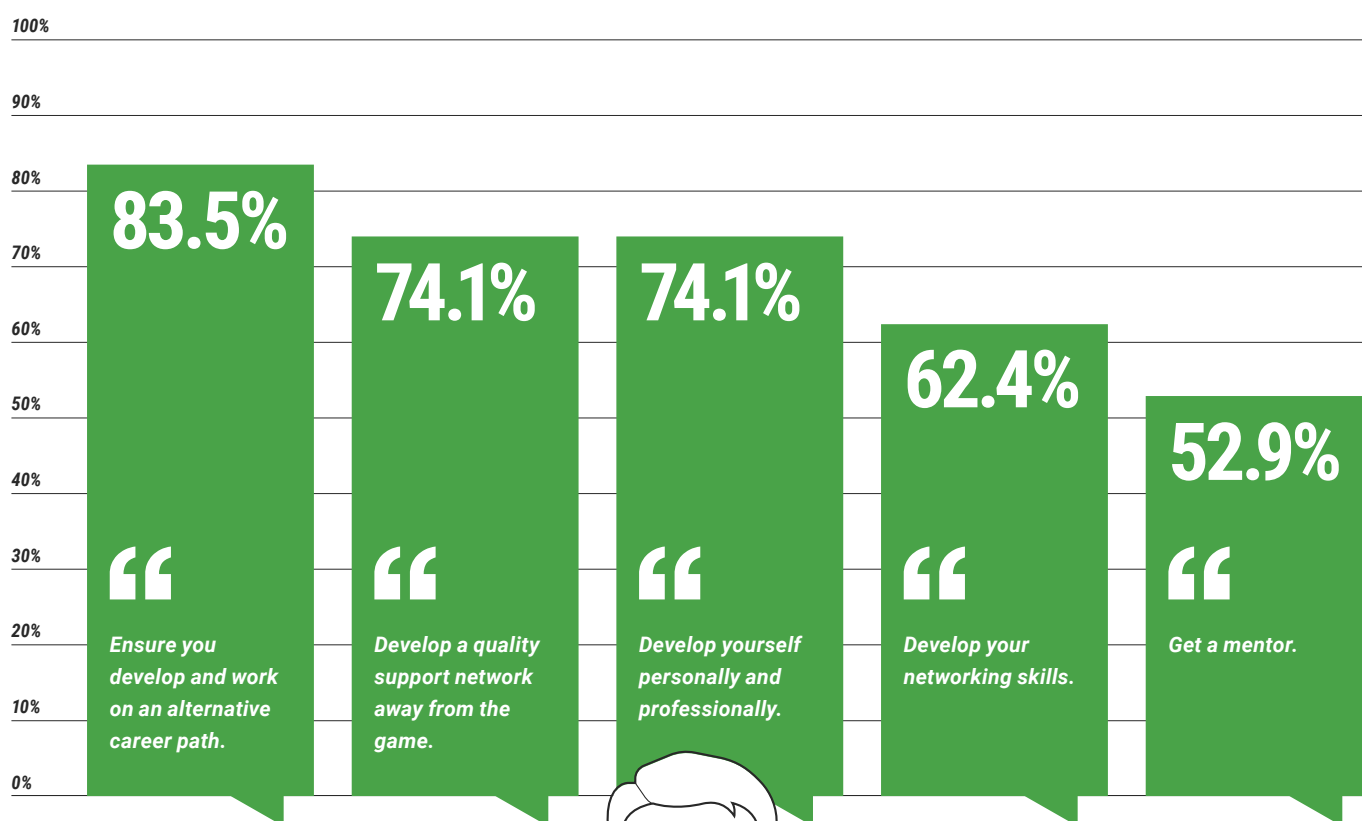
# GIVING BACK TO THE GAME



*Past players overwhelmingly indicated their willingness to play a greater role in game development and mentoring of the current generation*

# PAST PLAYERS' ADVICE FOR THE CURRENT GENERATION

What advice would you give current players about their transition? (multiple answers allowed)



# PFA ACTION PLAN

## The PFA Past Players Program - A member for life

The results of this study and the PFA's cultural experiences in supporting players for the past 26 years have shaped the development of the PFA Past Players Program.

The study highlights what we already know - that transition and retirement pose a range of challenges and that our sport has failed to provide adequate support to our past players.

The Past Players Program is the PFA's response to the broader game's failings and reflects the current generation's commitment to ensuring the contribution of those who came before them is acknowledged and that they are supported in their lives after football.

Through the program the PFA is committed to ensuring all past players have access to expert support in the areas of career and wellbeing and remain connected to the game.



Through the program players have access to a variety of career services; including:



**Career counselling**



**CV preparation**



**Coaching courses**



**Interview techniques and strategies**

To support physical and mental wellbeing past players will have access to a variety support services; including:



**Mental Health Referral Network**



**Skin Cancer Checks**



**Financial wellbeing**

To ensure past players' connection to the game remains long after retirement, the PFA will establish:



**Past players teams and tournaments**



**Host dedicated match day events for past players**

**COURAGE  
WORLD CLASS  
INTELLIGENCE  
TRUST  
RESPECT**



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