

2016-17 A-League Mid-Season Report

Technical benchmarking against international leagues



Professional Footballers Australia

Supporting the Players. Building the Game



About this Report

This report compares the A-League with three international leagues to identify tactical, technical and statistical trends at its halfway point.

The German Bundesliga was selected for its general excellence, the J.League for its regional relevance, and Major League Soccer for its unique similarities to our domestic competition.

We will again benchmark the A-League's performance against these leagues at the completion of the season.

The PFA believes a better informed game leads to more impactful football education, analysis and decision-making.



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Data: **opta**

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A-League / Bundesliga / J.League / MLS

Method

2016-17 A-League Rounds 1-15 are used. This cut-off was chosen to allow Wellington Phoenix and Melbourne Victory to complete their 'catch up' match, creating an even and balanced league appropriate for comparison.

The 2016-17 Bundesliga's winter break was used as a natural mid-season cut-off point, so its first 16 Rounds are included. The entire 2016 J.League and Major League Soccer (MLS) regular seasons are considered.

	Teams	Season	Matches
	10	2016-17 Rounds 1-15	75
	18	2016-17 Rounds 1-16	144
	18	2016 2 stages Excluding play-offs	306
	20 2 conferences	2016 Excluding play-offs	340

Team profiles

Average age of players used



Germany's world class youth development could be behind the Bundesliga's use of the youngest players of the leagues compared.

% of mins by foreign players



The A-League's regulations strike a balance between the J.League's 3+1 rule and Bundesliga's open model. MLS shares 160 international slots among its 20 clubs.

Players used per team

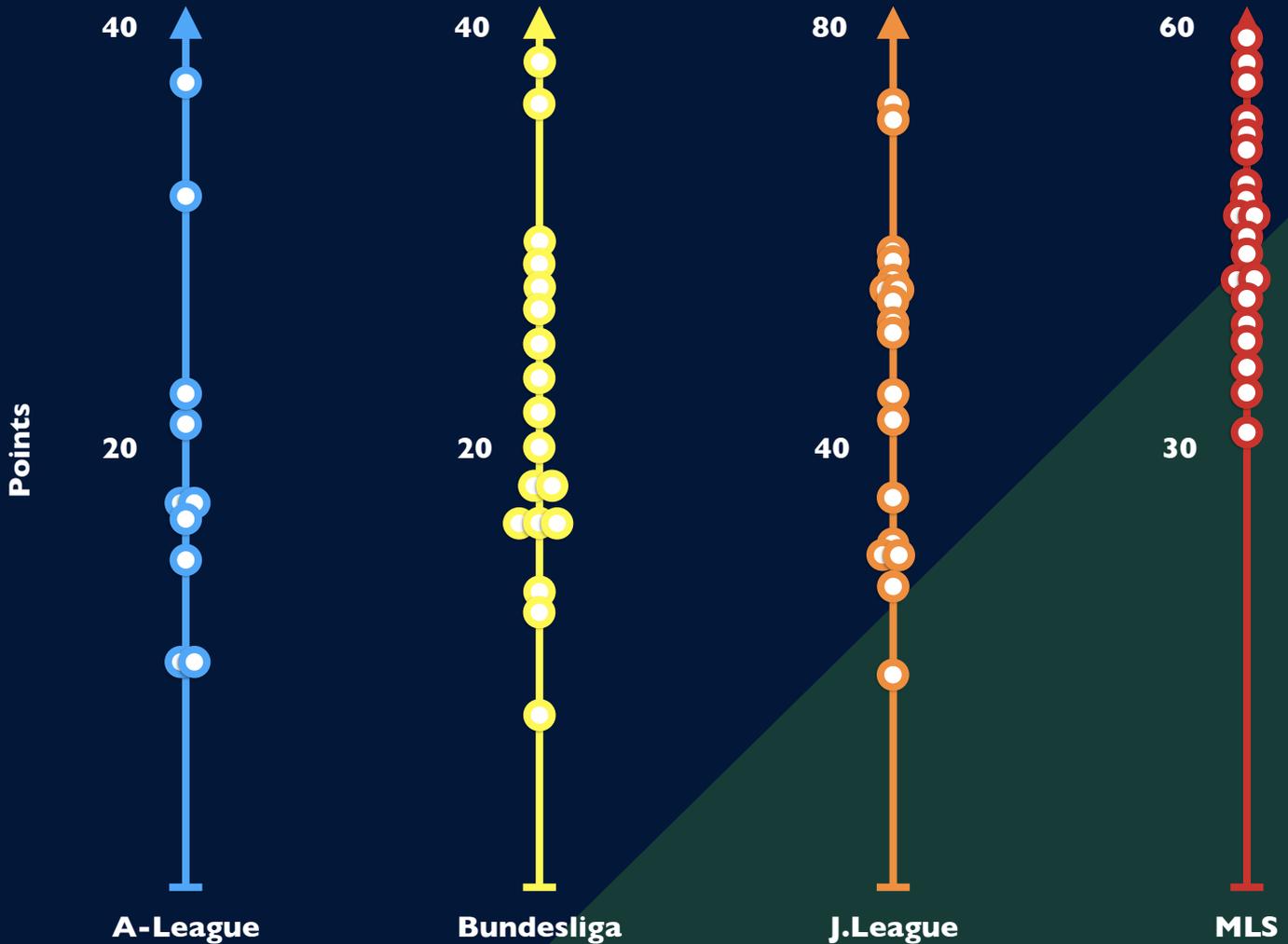


The A-League could have a narrower spread of talent than the Bundesliga. MLS and J.League have completed seasons and therefore saw more players used.

*Players from outside Australia and New Zealand



Competitiveness



The A-League's spread of teams is quite similar to the Bundesliga and the J.League, but the MLS stands apart as the most competitive league from top to bottom. This comparison raises questions over the efficacy of the A-League salary cap as an equaliser.

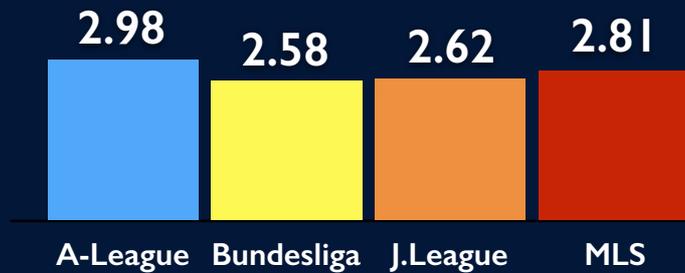
This pattern is not a one-off. In the previous two seasons the bottom team in the MLS won around half the points of the top team (30/60 and 28/64) while the A-League's bottom won less than one third the points of the Premiers (17/53, 13/49).

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Goals

Goals per game



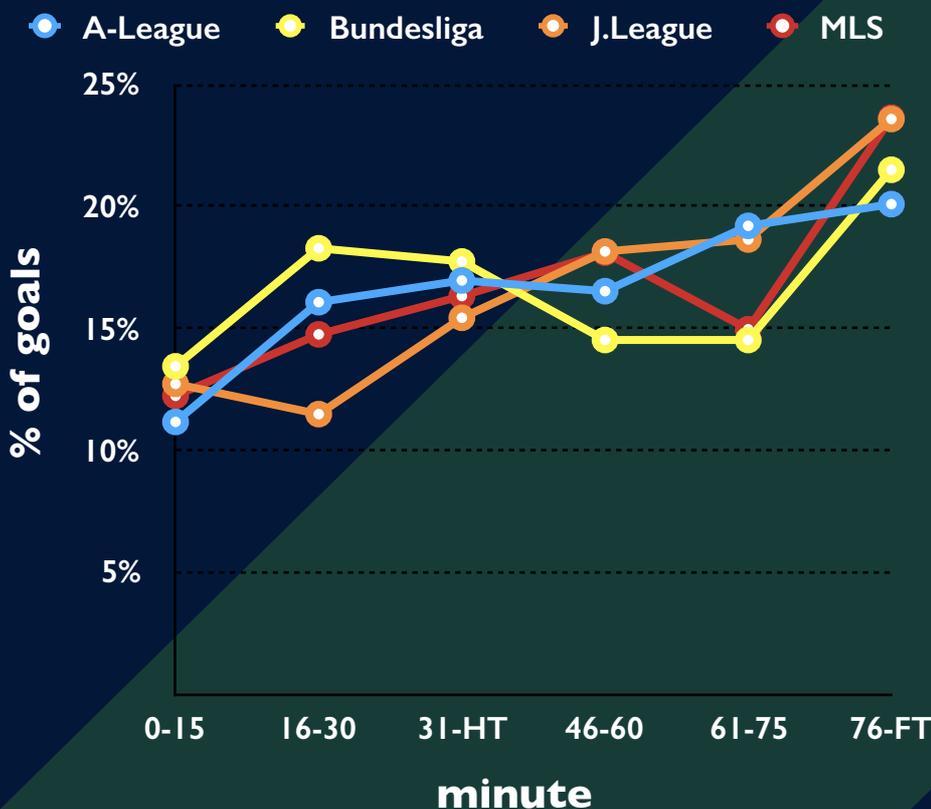
% of nil-all draws



The A-League stands tall as the most attacking league, with the most goals per game and by far the fewest scoreless draws.

The MLS was hot and cold with the second highest number of goals but also the highest likelihood of a nil-all result.

Scoring breakdown



The A-League features a steady climb in goals as the match progresses.

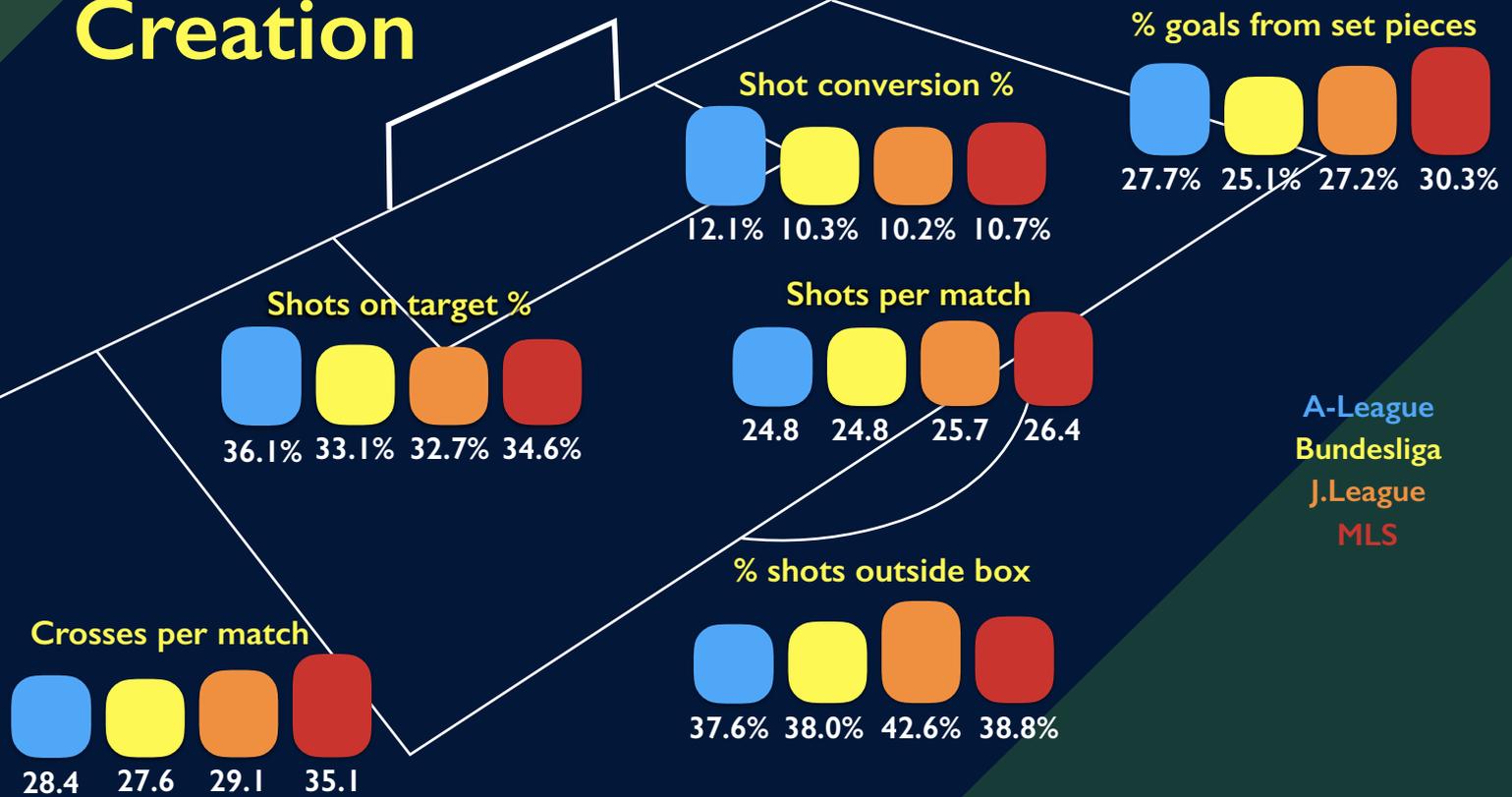
The current Bundesliga sees a high percentage of goals scored in the first half relative to the second half, besides the late flurry common across all four leagues.



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Creation



Why are there so many goals in the A-League? A-League teams take the equal fewest shots per match and appear to have an unremarkable reliance on crossing and set pieces.

The answer lies in conversion rates and chance quality. A-League sides tend to shoot from closer to goal and are significantly more likely to score with each shot.

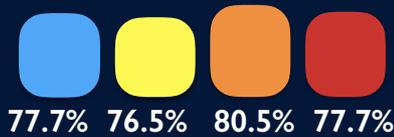
This raises further questions. Is there a disparity between the investment made by clubs in forwards compared to defenders? Or does the A-League have a transitional style where attackers have more space to shoot?



Passing and Possession

A-League
Bundesliga
J.League
MLS

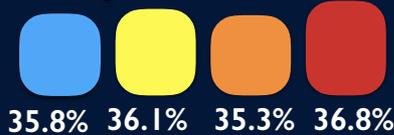
% passes completed



% passes in att. half



% passes forward



% passes long



Generally the A-League has a more balanced style of passing, most closely aligned with the Bundesliga, compared to the more direct MLS and the patient J.League.

Passing can also be affected by the defensive strategies common in each league. For example, the Bundesliga's relatively low passing completion could reflect high quality pressing.

Top possession teams

League position, average possession



Looking at the two top possession teams in each league, we see that the Bundesliga and J.League's have a tight correlation between possession and success, not shared by the A-League and MLS.

Defending and Game Styles

<i>per match</i>	Passes	Tackles	Interceptions	Fouls	Offsides
A-League	840	37.5	37.6	31.0	4.9
Bundesliga	912	37.1	42.9	30.0	4.6
J.League	934	29.6	34.9	25.3	4.6
MLS	835	36.4	35.7	24.6	4.0

The A-League has a low number of passes per match, similar to the MLS, despite its teams generally trying to keep possession more than MLS teams (see page 8).

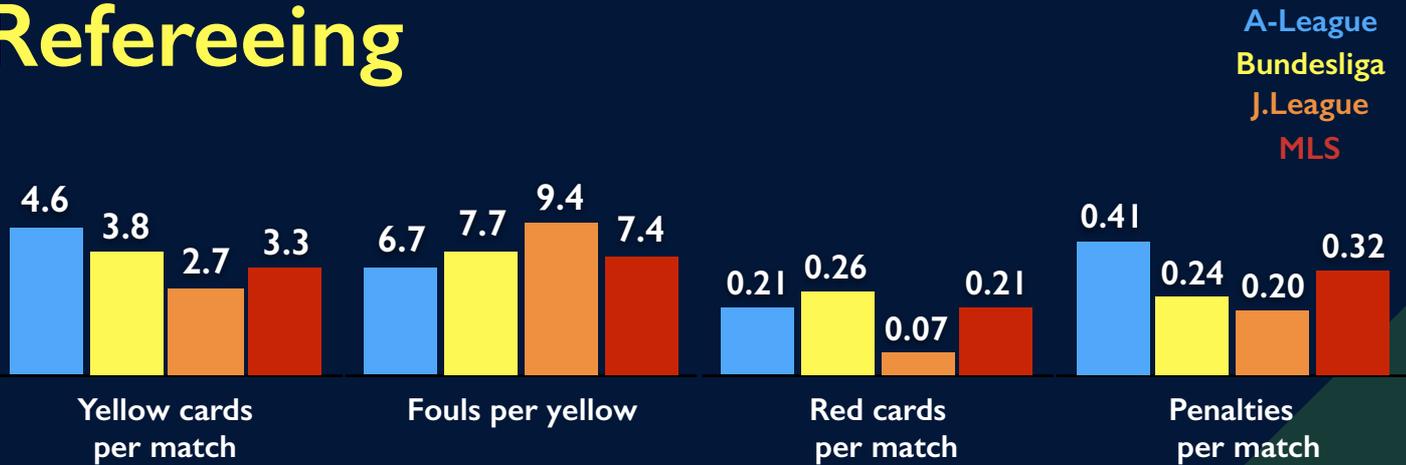
This suggests the A-League is a slower league, perhaps due to a proliferation of stoppages (which is backed up by the data on fouls and offsides) or the Australian summer heat.

The Bundesliga features the highest number of interceptions, which are synonymous with pressing teams.

The A-League and the Bundesliga otherwise have similar aggressive defensive profiles with a high amount of actions, especially when compared with the J.League which has emerged as having a passive and ponderous style of play.



Refereeing



A-League referees are the most active of the four leagues. A-League matches feature the most yellow cards and penalties, and A-League players are permitted the fewest fouls before a yellow card is drawn. The Bundesliga sees a marginally higher frequency of red cards.

For clarity, this does not necessarily mean that A-League officials are twice as harsh as their J.League counterparts, for instance. While a difference in interpretation appears likely, it is also possible the A-League simply has a higher number of sanction-worthy incidents.



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