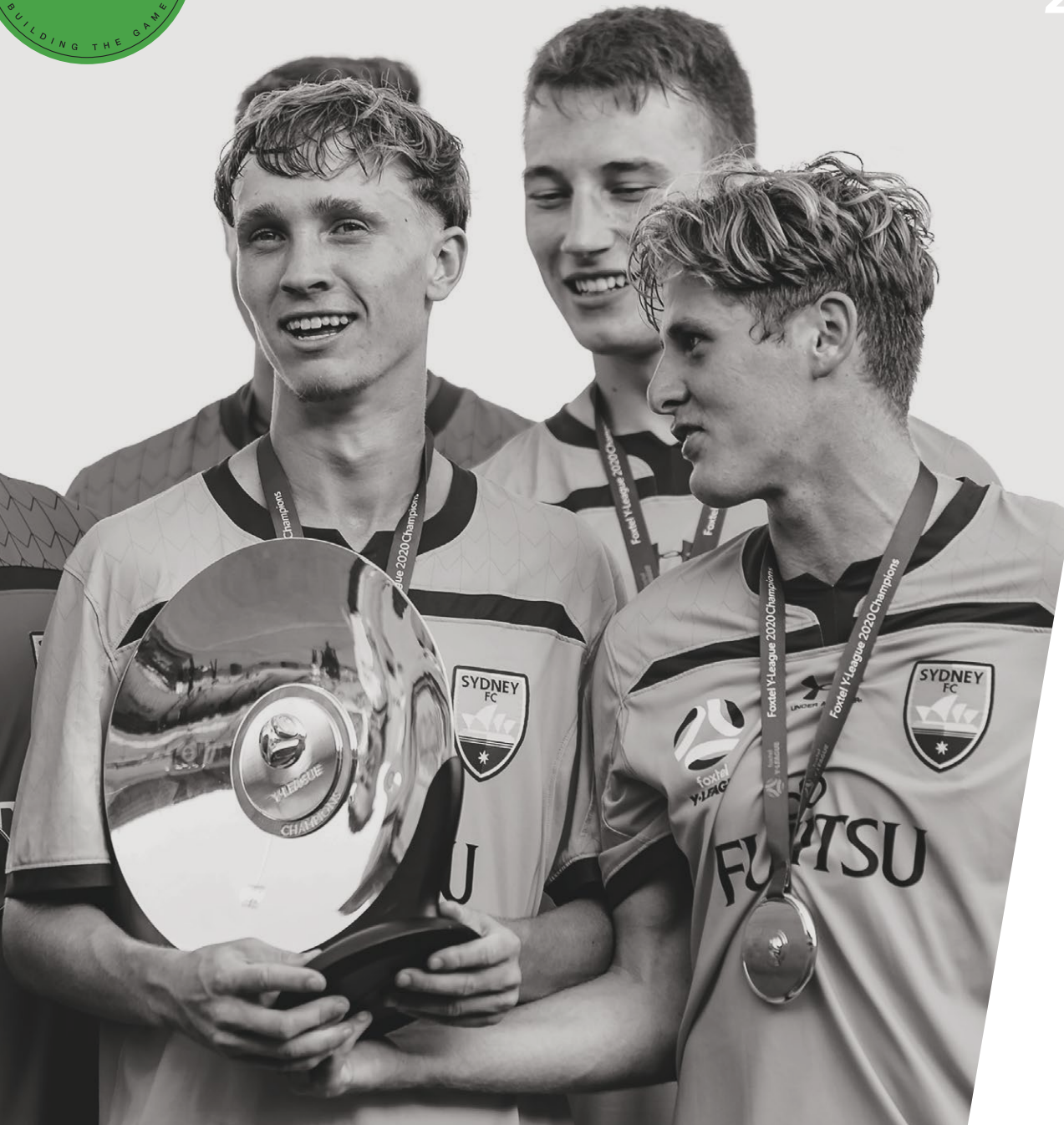


Y-LEAGUE



2020



PATHWAY AND WORKPLACE CONDITIONS REPORT

SUPPORTING THE PLAYERS BUILDING THE GAME



FOREWORD

A review of the Y-League, or National Youth League, may be trite amid the uncertainty of football at the moment.

Equally, though, its timing may be perfect.

For many years, a national youth competition was the fundamental pillar in the career trajectory of Australian footballers. Many Australian footballers who would go on to light up the global stage for the Socceroos now look back fondly on having cut their footballing teeth in the NYL, playing as a curtain raiser to an NSL match or hosting an elite team at their suburban soccer club.

In the recently released PFA study, Culture Amplifies Talent, many players spoke to the transformative impact of the National Youth League on their career. Players were able to pin-point one match, one moment, one experience, that was central to their drive to climb the summit.

The current Y-League could not be further removed as a source of inspiration.

Through a combination of historical analysis and current player surveying, we have a competition that does not meet the needs of the players, A-League clubs or Australian football.

We have a competition that churns through players (with the average Y-League career being 1.9 seasons), provides limited exposure to a long-term football career and asks significant sacrifice from its players (almost 2 out of 3 players miss school to attend training commitments).

The most powerful determinant of a player's future success as a player is the amount of football they play between the ages of 18 and 21. With the Y-League stagnating at 8 matches per season and the inconsistent standard of competition across the NPL, we are not building a platform for the development of players.

As we reconfigure Australian football, our sole focus needs to be on "building value" in our players and clubs.

Building value means increasing your worth in the global football economy. Building value means making decisions today that are likely to pay off in the years ahead. It's the young player who opts to sign for a club where he'll play more matches rather than pick up a bigger pay-cheque. It's the club that signs Trent Sainsbury and not William Gallas.

The evolution of the Y-League is fundamental to Australian football building the value it needs.

At the moment, the Y-League is nothing more than a cost centre. It is a cost centre because the competition – and by extension each club – does not allocate its investments strategically enough to enable it to build the value it needs.

More matches, more sessions and greater opposition. Raise the age, lift the level of competition and give players the time they need to turn into the footballers we all want them to become.

We thank the over 100 players who contributed their time to help shape this research report and trust we can use this pause in the sport to reflect on how we can most effectively design the Y-League to produce the best possible players for club and country.

Warm Regards,

John Didulica
Chief Executive



Photography by

Joe Janko
(Adelaide United)

Jamie Castaneda
(Sydney FC)

Daniel Sproule
(Newcastle Jets)



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ABOUT THE REPORT

The National Youth League was restructured in 2015, branching out to a dual-conference system comprising five teams in each conference. Furthermore, each A-League club entered its youth teams into their respective National Premier League (NPL) competition, in effect, providing competition for participants all year round.

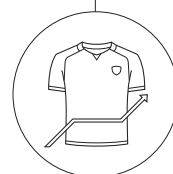
For the first time, the PFA has analysed the progression of every Y-League participant, spanning the five-year period upon the competition's restructure. This report provides a snapshot of the fledgling careers of over 700 players, paying particular attention to those who have graduated from the Y-League and progressed to senior football, be it in the A-League, at a club overseas or with a semi-professional football club in the NPL.

The PFA have engaged the current crop of Y-League players, conducting a survey with 110 respondents upon the conclusion of the 2019/20 season which sheds further light on the expectations and experiences that our youngest athletes are faced with as they attempt to build a professional football career.

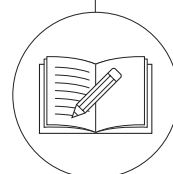




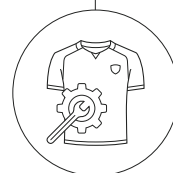
The PFA conducted this report with the primary objective of gaining a clear understanding of the working conditions of Y-League players, including:



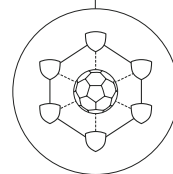
The Professional Career Pathway



Education and Football



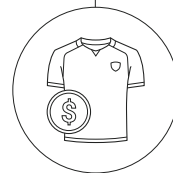
Building Football Careers



Competition Structure



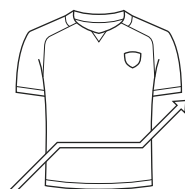
Workplace Standards and Conditions



Financial Position

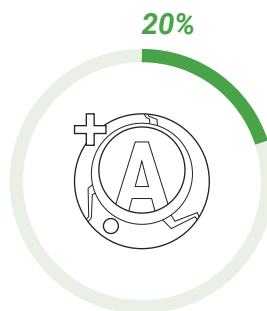
EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

OVER THE PAST FIVE SEASONS OF THE Y-LEAGUE:



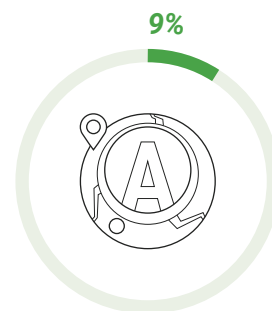
1.9 SEASONS

is the average Y-League career



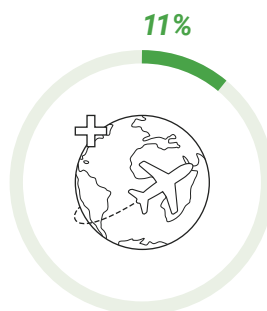
146

Y-League players have played in the A-League



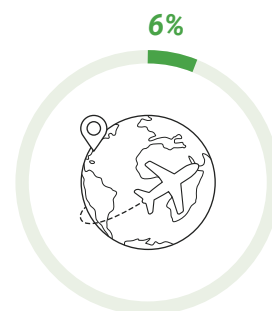
63

Y-League players are currently in the A-League



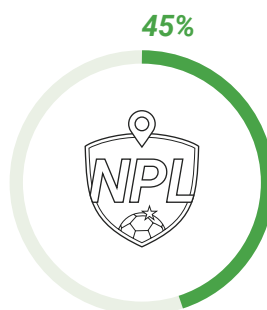
78

Y-League players have played overseas



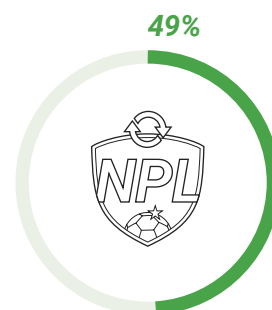
42

Y-League players are currently overseas



323

Y-League players are currently at an NPL club



355

Y-League players have returned to an NPL club



OF THE PLAYERS SURVEYED:



59%

of players missed study because of Y-League training commitments



84%

of Y-League players are living at home



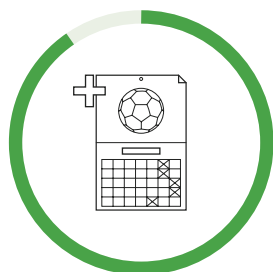
51%

of players were in their first season of Y-League



18%

of Y-League players have had National Team Representation

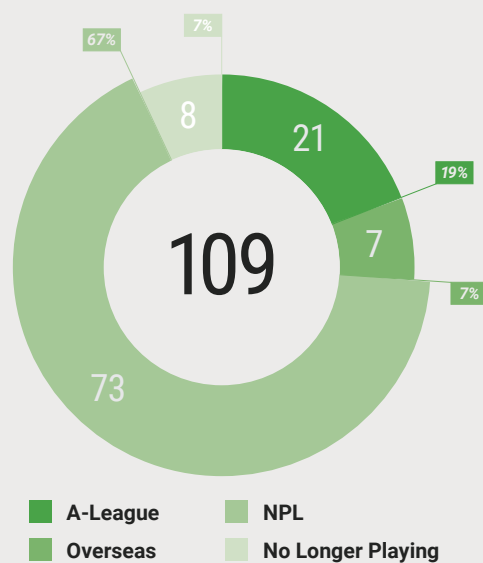
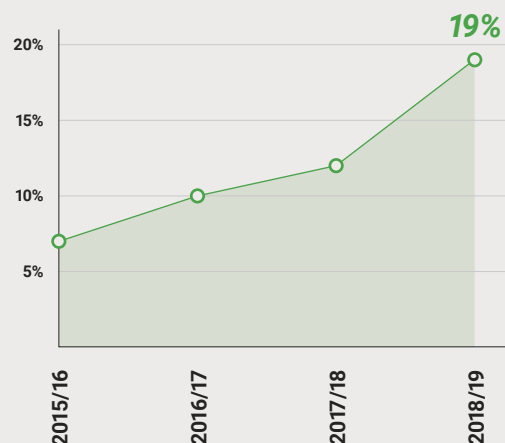


90%

of players believe the Y-League season needs to be longer

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Percentage of players currently in the A-League



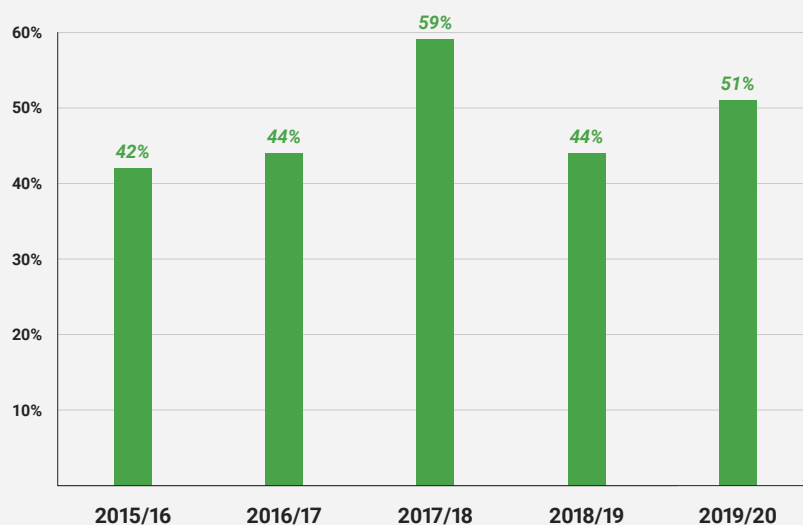
At the conclusion of season 2018/19, there were 109 Y-League graduates. Where are they now?

Y-League graduates are a diminishing breed at A-League level. Only 21 of the Y-League graduates from 2018/19 transitioned to the A-League. These players remain contracted with an A-League club, but history suggests that their lifespan as a professional footballer is short, with only 7 per cent of graduates from 2016 remaining in the domestic professional system. The vast majority of Y-League footballers move to an NPL club upon concluding their time with an A-League club, with very few moving overseas.

A PROFESSIONAL CAREER PATHWAY

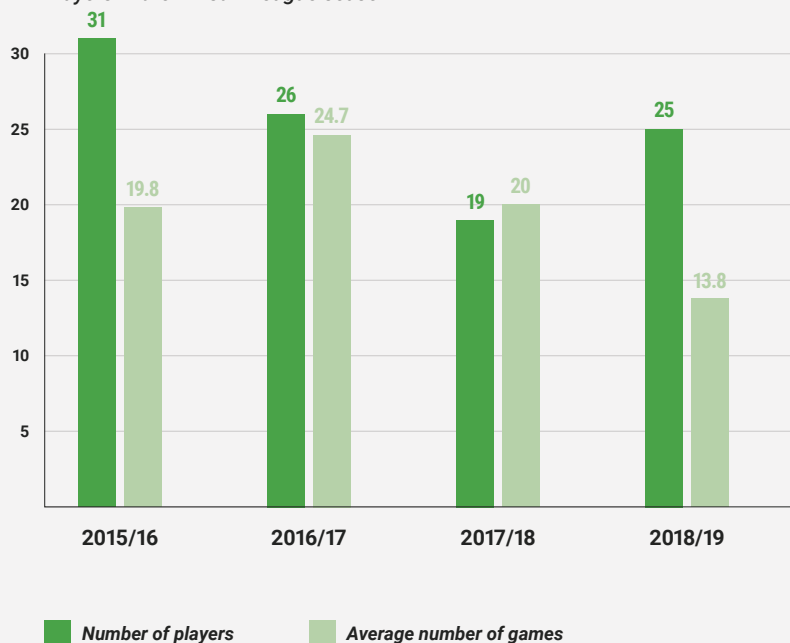
Given the turnover, it is little surprise that more than 40 per cent of the players in each season are making their Y-League debuts. This peaked at 59 per cent in 2017/18, with a little over half of the players in the most recently completed campaign appearing in the Y-League for the first time.

Players in their first Y-League season

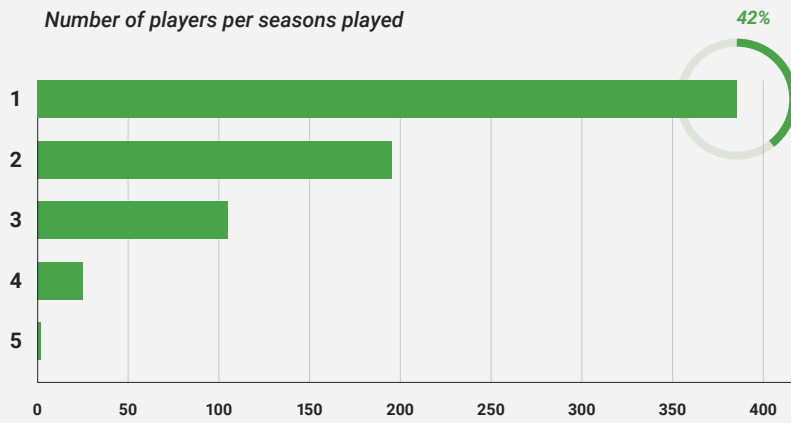


Few players move onto the A-League at the conclusion of every season. Of those players that graduated from the Y-League in 2015/16, a mere 31 have played in Australia's premier domestic competition and average 19.8 matches per player as of March 2020. When you extrapolate this over the course of the past four seasons, that's barely 5 games a year of senior football. While fewer players are transitioning to the A-League at the conclusion of each corresponding season, their average appearances per season have improved, with the class of 2017/18 currently playing an average of 10 games per season.

Players in their first Y-League season

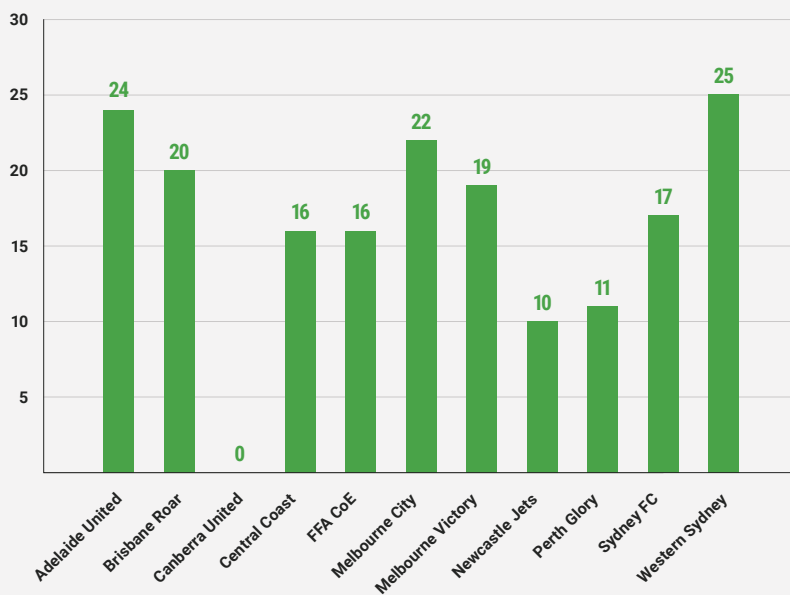


Number of players per seasons played



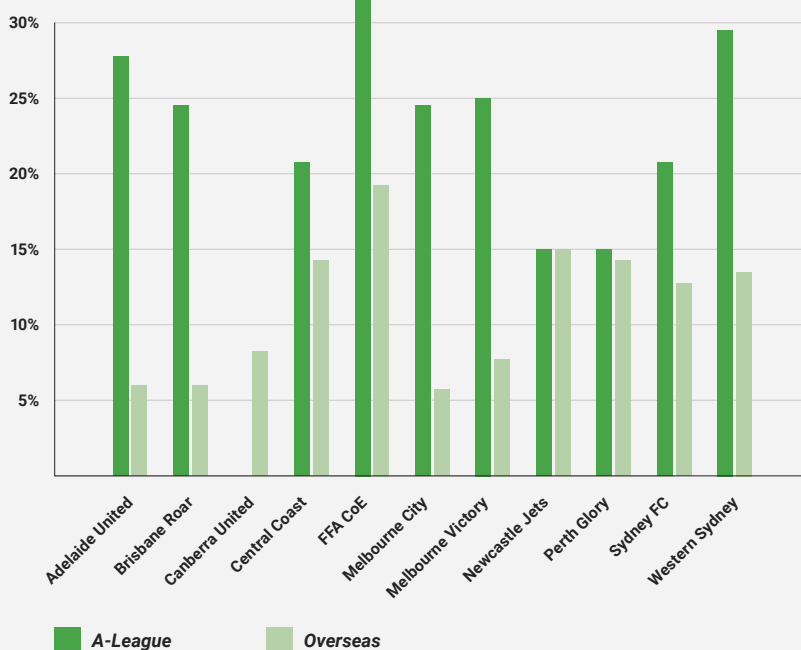
The vast majority of players in the Y-League play a single season (42 per cent), with almost half playing between 2 to 3 seasons for a single club. Another 6 per cent appeared in four seasons, with seven players playing in all five seasons of the sampled period.

Number of Y-League players that have played in the A-League



When you explore this dynamic at club level, Western Sydney Wanderers have produced the most number of professional players, having seen 25 of their youngsters play at least one match in the A-League, with Adelaide United (24) and Melbourne City (22) not too far behind.

Percentage of Y-League players that have transitioned to the A-League vs overseas



When this is correlated in terms of percentage conversion, those clubs are joined by Melbourne Victory and Brisbane Roar. What's most impressive though is the Football Centre of Excellence, which competed in two of the seasons sampled. With 1 in 3 players progressing to the A-League, this represents the best conversion rate of any of the competing clubs. This is also reflected in transfers to overseas clubs, where almost 1 in 5 have played overseas.

Ultimately, the vast majority of Y-League players transition into semi-professional football, playing in the first or second tiers of the National Premier League across any one of the nine member federations. Victoria and New South Wales provide the most opportunity, with 89 players finding a home in each of those competitions over the past five years. Of surveyed Y-League Players:



40%

were in their second or third Y-League season



44%

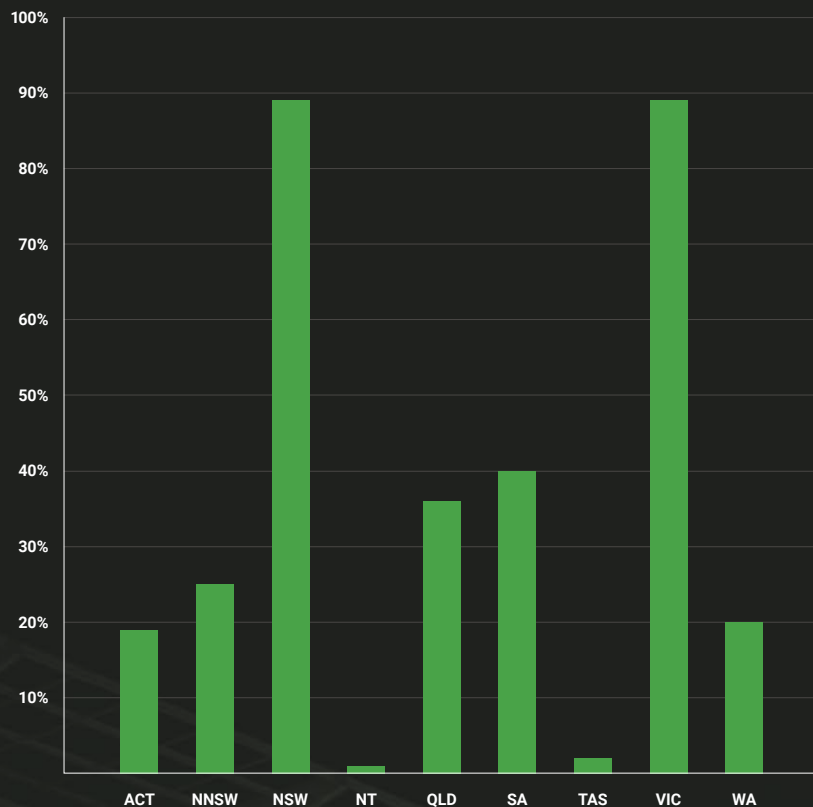
have been called into a Young Socceroos or Joeys camp



60%

were making their Y-League debut

NPL players by member federation



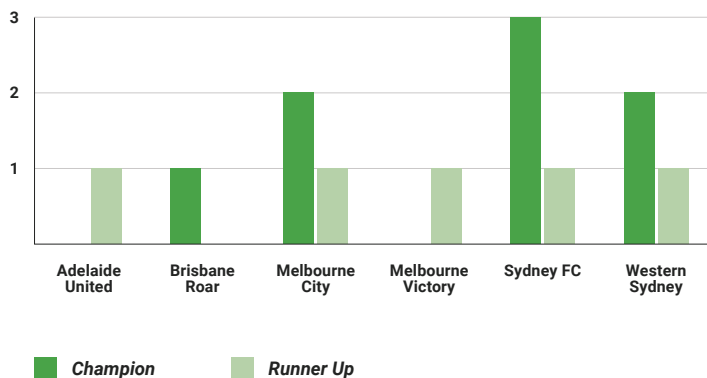
"I think the Y-League is a good league, but could do with improvements such as making the season longer and more integration with the A-League"

"We need to invest more money in academy football like they do overseas. Allowing for a national youth league that runs alongside the senior competition will provide more opportunities to step up to the A-League level"

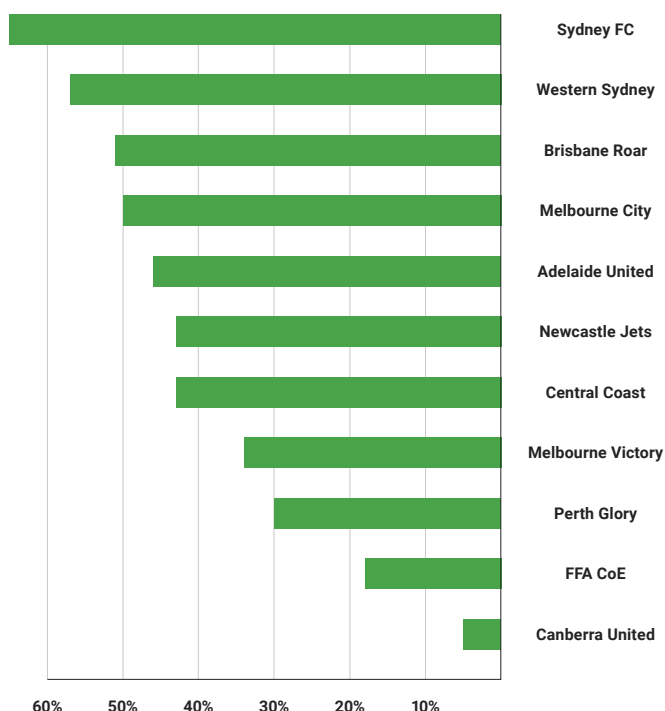


The trends for talent production are also reflected in the success of these clubs over the course of this five year period, although Sydney FC is something of an outlier in this regard, having gained the most success of any club with 2 championships and a runner-up finish, yet producing fewer professional players than any of the clubs who have played off for the title.

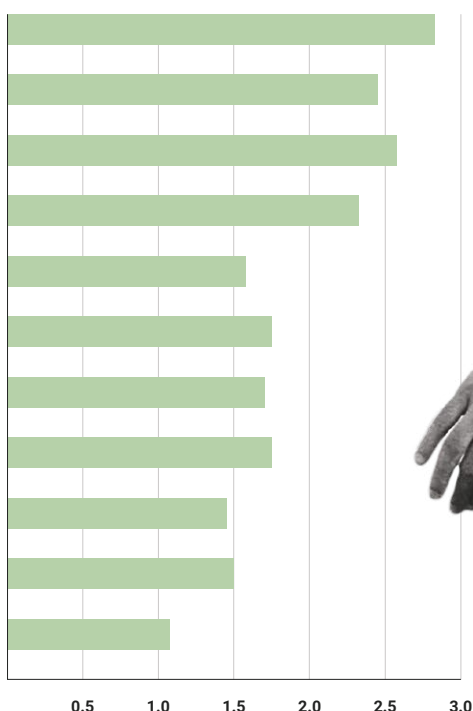
Y-League club success



Y-League club winning percentage



Y-League club goals per game



FOXTEL Y-LEAGUE
CHAMPIONS

2020

Y-LEAGUE OPPORTUNITY AND WORKPLACE CONDITIONS REPORT 2020

Two of the A-League's brightest young talents are currently among the world's best young players in terms of the amount of match minutes they have accumulated in their domestic league. Promising Adelaide United midfielder Louis D'Arrigo appeared in all but one league match for the Reds to sit pretty in the Top 10 amongst the best performing players from around the world.

Wellington Phoenix defender Liberato Cacace sits just outside that illustrious group, but the performances of both players along with a host of others that have managed more than half the allotted match time available illustrates that when young players are afforded an opportunity, they are capable of delivering at senior level.

Highest Percentage of Domestic League minutes 2019/20

WORLDWIDE

PERCENTAGE	PLAYER	CLUB	COUNTRY
100%	Sven Botman	SC Heerenveen	Netherlands
95%	Dejan Kulusevski	Parma Calcio	Italy
94%	Sandro Tonali	Brescia Calcio	Italy
92%	Max Aarons	Norwich City	England
92%	Conor Gallagher	Swansea City	England
91%	Gustavo Assunção	Famalicão FC	Portugal
91%	Adam Hložek	AC Sparta Praha	Czech Republic
90%	Louis D'Arrigo	Adelaide United	Australia
89%	Eduardo Camavinga	Stade Rennais	France
88%	Leonidas Stergiou	FC St Gallen	Switzerland

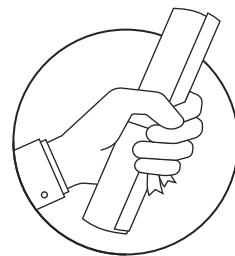
A-LEAGUE

PERCENTAGE	PLAYER	CLUB
90%	Louis D'Arrigo	Adelaide United
86%	Liberato Cacace	Wellington Phoenix
60%	Joel King	Sydney FC
57%	Lewis Miller	Central Coast Mariners
56%	Daniel Wilmering	Western Sydney Wanderers
52%	Angus Thurgate	Newcastle Jets
50%	Samuel Silvera	Central Coast Mariners
47%	Jerry Skotadis	Western United
46%	Anthony Lesiotis	Melbourne Victory
44%	Al Hassan Toure	Adelaide United

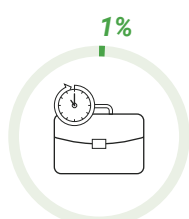
International statistics courtesy of CIES Football Observatory.
Players born on or after 01/01/2000. Season 2019/20, domestic league matches until 27/01/2020.

BALANCING EDUCATION & WORK WITH FOOTBALL

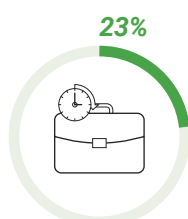
The PFA offers education grants to players, helping them balance football with study



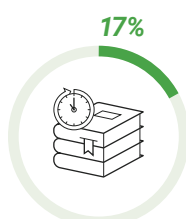
What best describes what you are doing away from football?



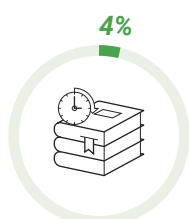
Full time work



Part time / casual work



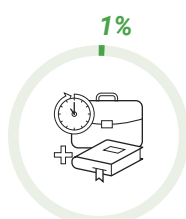
Full time study



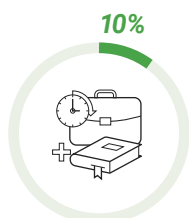
Part time study



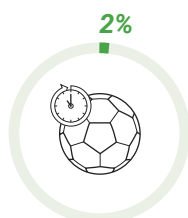
Still at school



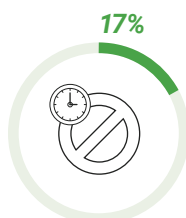
Combining study and full time work



Combining study and part time work



Full time professional footballer



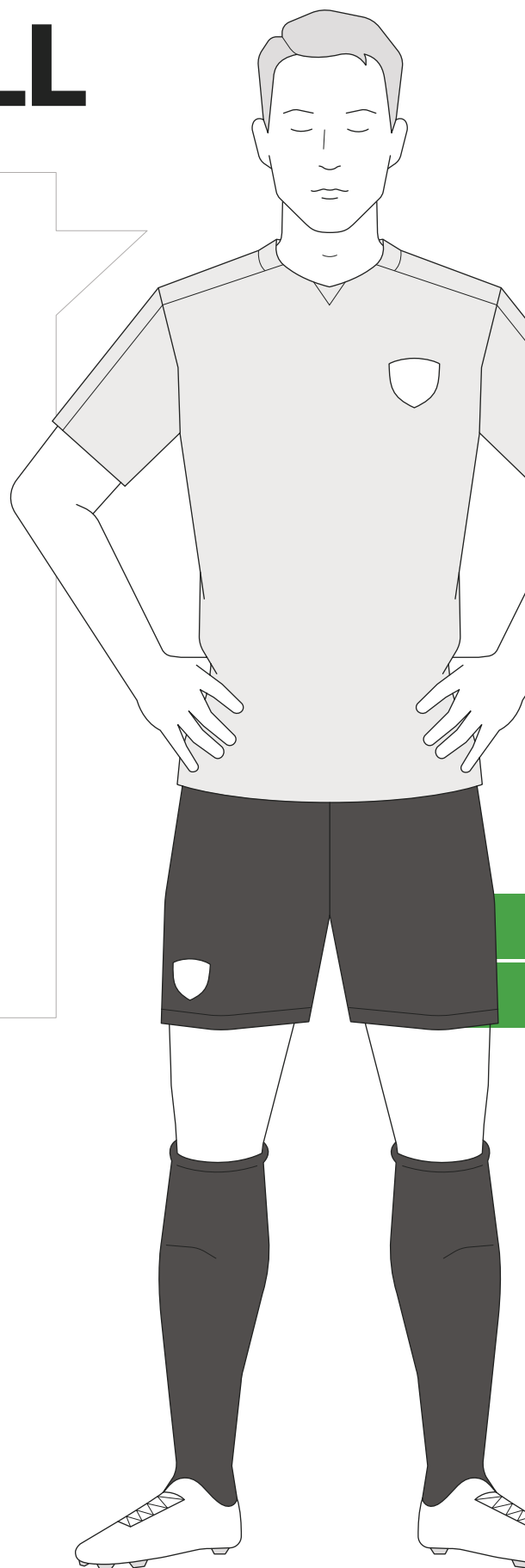
No other commitments



of surveyed Y-League players are currently studying in some form



of surveyed Y-League players have missed school because of Y-League commitments





87%

of players complete their study on campus with only 3 per cent studying online



50%

of players have ceased study due to football commitments



62%

of players study / work more than 11 hours a week outside of the Y-League

"Arriving late to school three or four times a week is pretty common"



17%

of those players study / work more than 31 hours a week



43%

of players studying / working said getting time off work was either stressful or very stressful



35%

of players said they had insufficient time to study with Y-League commitments

"I miss an hour of school every day of the week"



50%

of players said the reason they weren't working / studying away from football was because they couldn't find an accommodating employer



33%

of players ceased their employment due to football commitments



50%

of players said football was their primary source of income

BUILDING FOOTBALL CAREERS

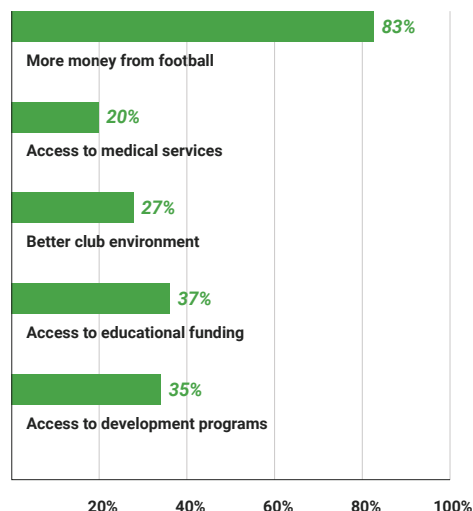
When asked which factors would assist in prolonging their football career 83 per cent of players believe a better wage is the most important factor to prolonging their football career. Players rated access to educational funding as the second most important factor in prolonging their careers.



83%

of players believe a better wage is the most important factor to prolonging their football career

Which of the following factors do you believe would assist in prolonging your football career?



"We need better facilities in regard to pitch and recovery equipment, this will reduce injuries so we can have longer careers"

"Better pay for Y-League players, longer season, more professional feel (make it similar to A-League)"



Y-LEAGUE COMPETITION STRUCTURE

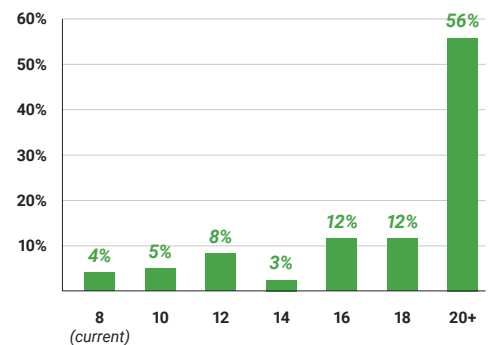
"There needs to be a smaller gap between Y-league and A-League so when players need to transition up it's much easier than it is at the moment"

"More games. Should be in line with the A-League season"

"Remove two pools and create one main competition playing alongside A-League and W-League"

When asked to prioritize ways in which the Y-League could be improved, extending the length of the season beyond eight rounds was of utmost performance, with 73% of players rating this the number one priority for the league. 90 per cent of all players believe that the season needs to be longer than ten rounds, with 56 per cent espousing a competition that sees them playing at least 20 matches.

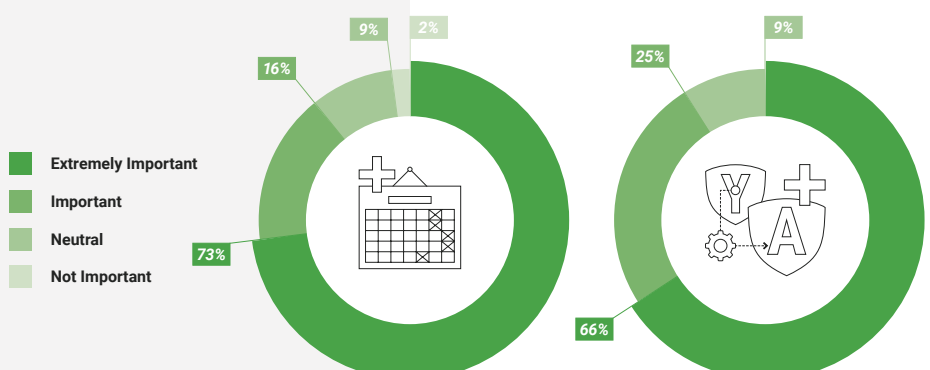
How many matches do you believe the Y-League season should be?



Almost as strong as extending the length of the season was a desire for greater integration into the A-League. This reinforces the premise that young players are desperate for more opportunities to train and play with the A-League team.

Longer Y-League season

Greater integration with the A-League

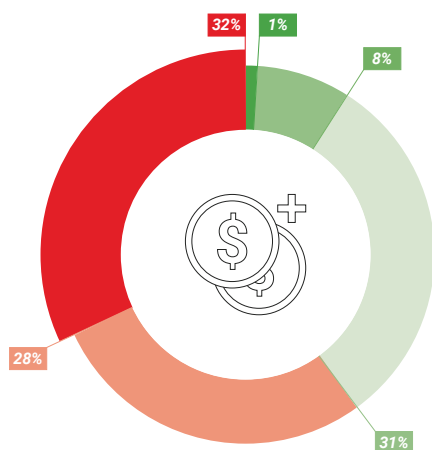


WORKPLACE STANDARDS

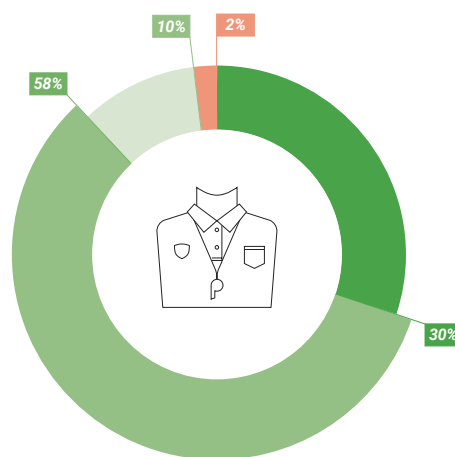
The Y-League players were asked to rate a number of key facets which are imperative to their make up as an aspiring professional footballer. They were asked to provide ratings on a five-point sliding scale, from perfect to very poor.

- Perfect
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Poor
- Very Poor

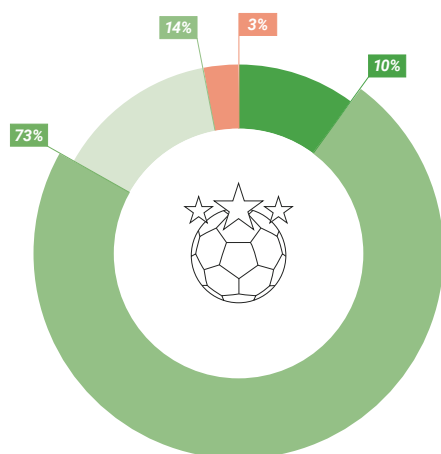
Remuneration / pay



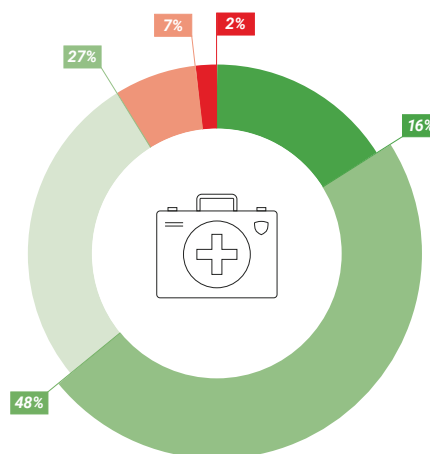
Coaching



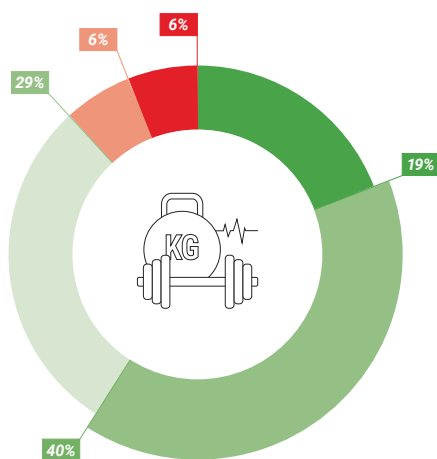
Y-League playing standard



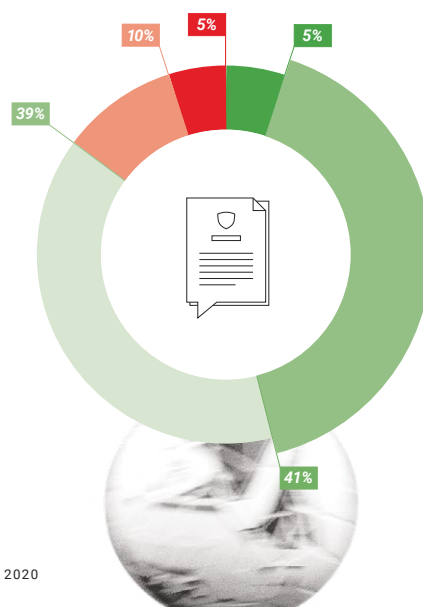
Clubs medical / rehab facilities



Gym facilities



Communication from club





Jack Smith Park



3.5



AJ Kelly Park



3.5



Eric Evans Oval



4.0



Pluim Park



5.0



CB Smith Reserve



4.3



AAMI Park



4.5



Epping Stadium



4.0



NO.2 Sportsground



2.0



Dorrien Gardens



2.3



Jubilee Stadium



4.0



Leichhardt Oval



4.0



Marconi Stadium



4.0



Valentine Sports Park



3.0

Average



3.7

PITCH RATINGS

The Pitch Ratings data was collected by the players after each match day. At least one away player from each team answers a pitch and conditions survey where they rate a variety of standards on match day. Including hardness of pitch, pace of pitch, standard of match facilities and overall pitch quality.



88%

of players said the accommodation for away trips were at an acceptable standard



84%

of players said the match day facilities were of an acceptable standard



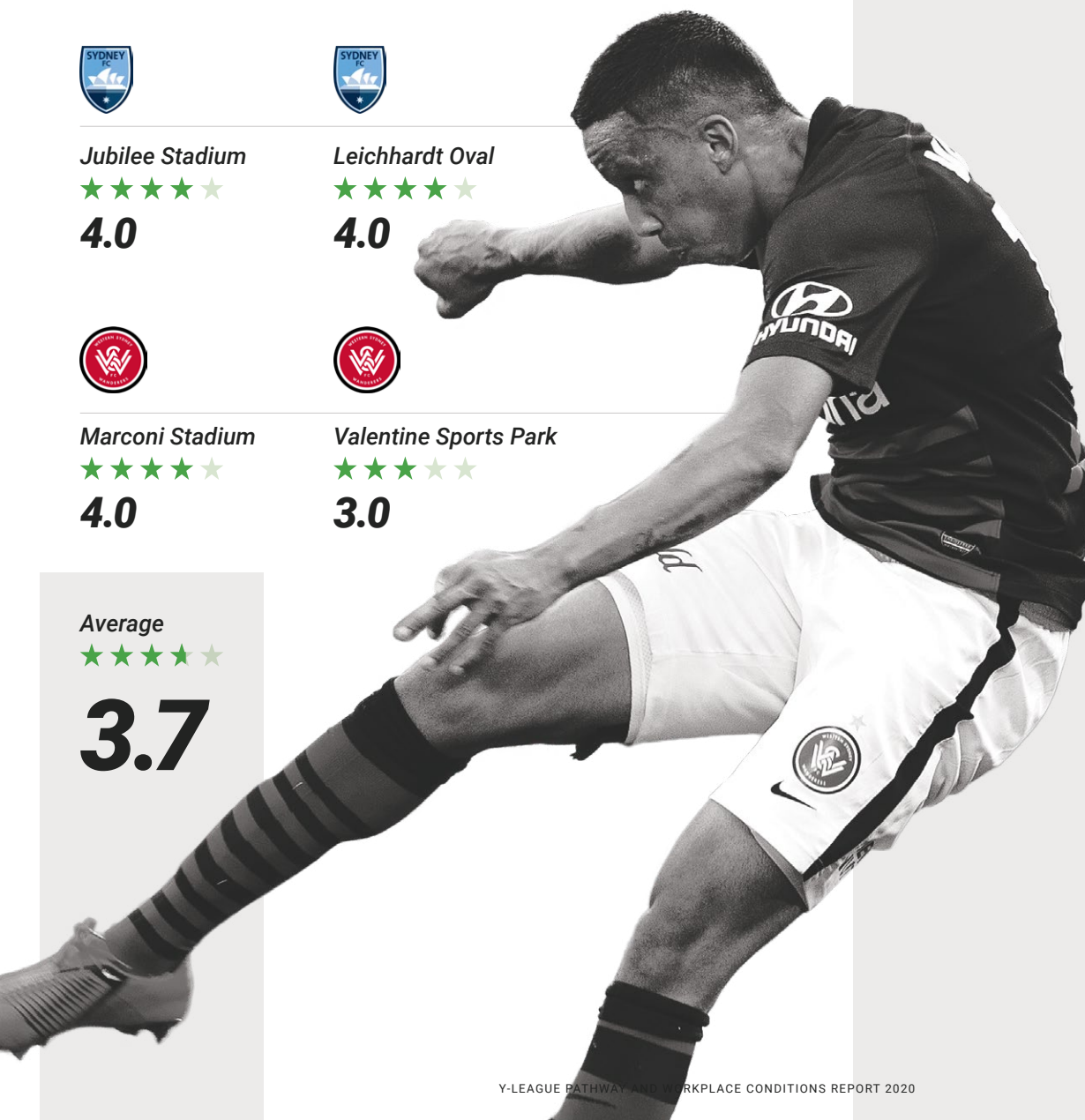
100%

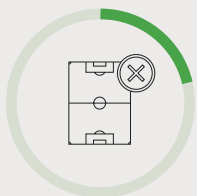
of players said that a physio was present on match day



66%

of players said no doctor was present on match day



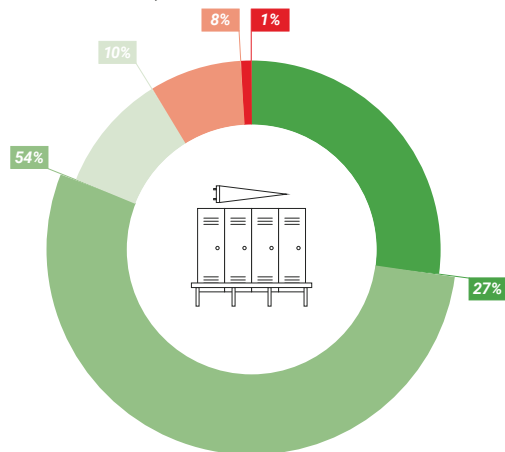


22%

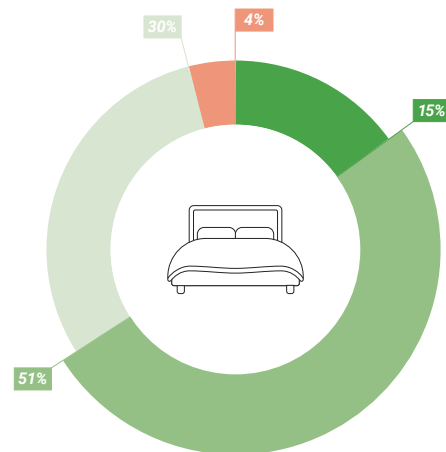
of players believed that the training pitch was either Poor or Very Poor

- Perfect
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Poor
- Very Poor

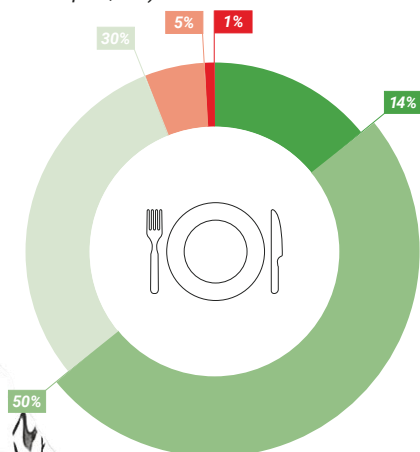
Home playing facilities (surface, change rooms etc)



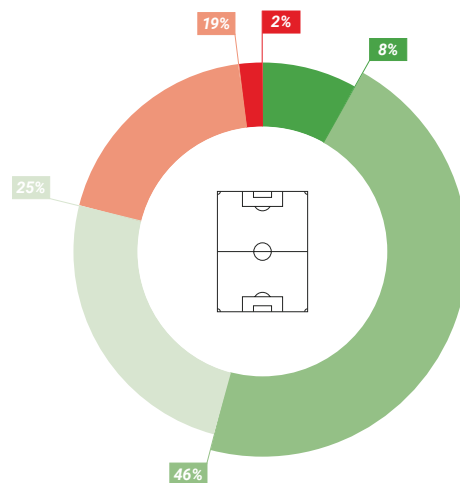
Travel & accommodation for away trips



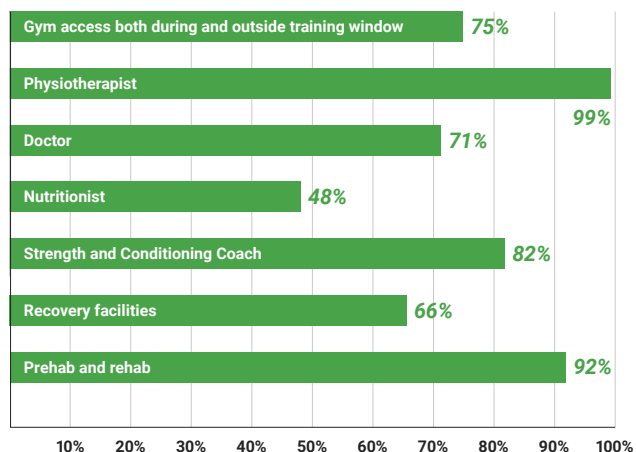
Logistics for away games (meals, transport, etc)



Training pitch

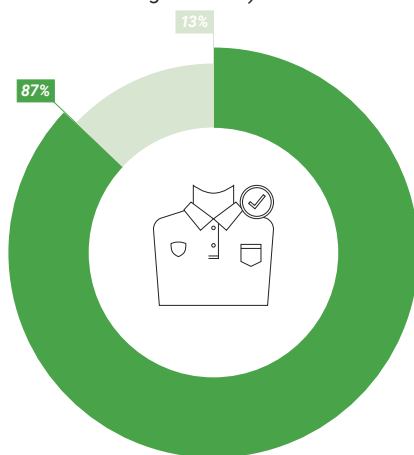


Services that your Y-League club provides you with

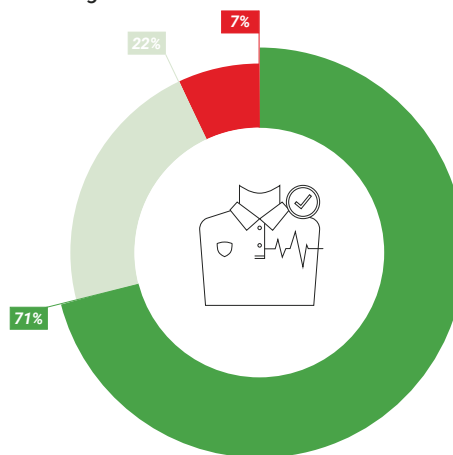


Yes ■
 Sometimes ■
 No ■

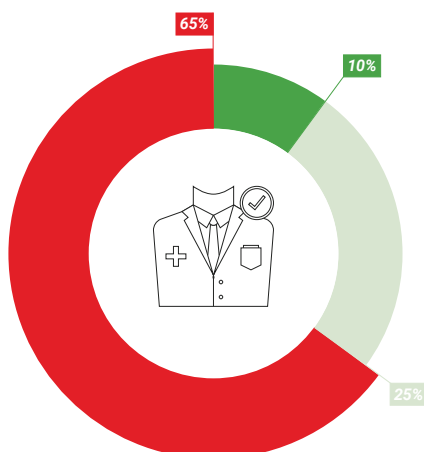
Physiotherapist available (before, during & after training sessions)



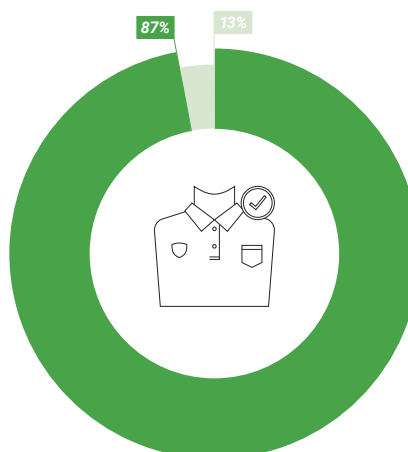
Strength & conditioning coach at training sessions



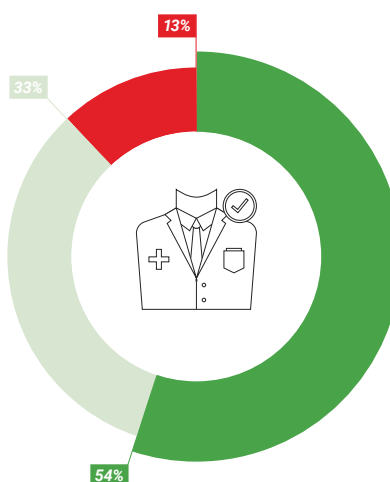
Doctor at training sessions



Physiotherapist at match



Doctor at match



93%

of players did undergo a medical screening prior to the start of the season



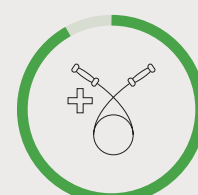
75%

of players said they had access to Gym both during and outside training windows



66%

of players had access to recovery facilities



92%

of players had access to rehab / prehab equipment

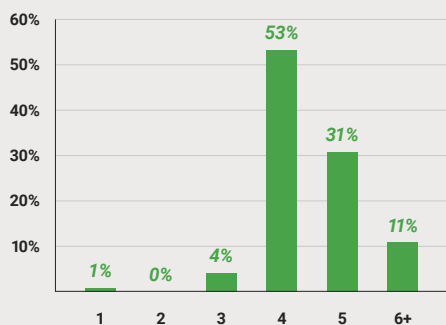


48%

of players had access to nutritionists

WORKLOAD (HOURS OF WORK)

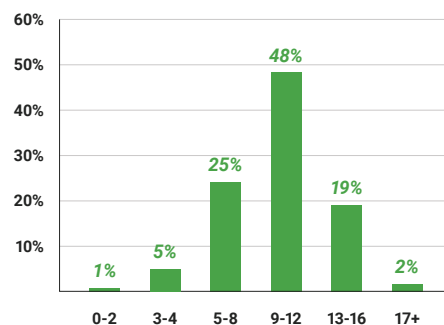
In a typical week how many team based training sessions do you have?



95%

of players competed in at least 4 training sessions a week, with more than half at exactly that number

In a typical week, how many team based training hours would you undertake?



32%

of players receive their training schedule for the entire season



25%

of players receive their training schedule two weeks in advance



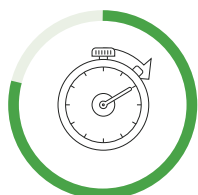
4%

of players do not receive a training schedule at all



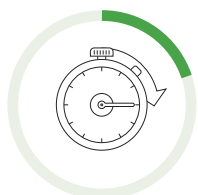
89%

of players play in the NPL / state league for their Y-league club in the winter



79%

of players indicated that the duration of a team-based training session was 1-2 hours



20%

of players answered that sessions lasted 2-3 hours



67%

of players indicated they did additional training outside their Y-League club commitments



41%

of players said they trained on their own 2 times a week



45%

of players said they trained on their own 3 or more times a week



FINANCIAL POSITION



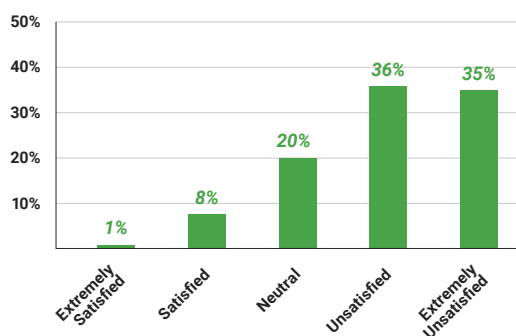
"Individual payment plans or some way of helping people who need to travel long distances to train and play"

Y-League players suggested boots (95 per cent) and transport (85 per cent) were the most significant expenses. A number of players have suggested that their earnings barely cover many of the out-of-pocket expenses they incur during a Y-League season, especially those players who are living out of home.

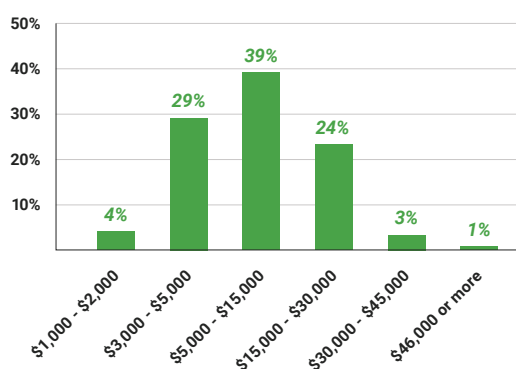
"More budget allowed to pay the players as some aren't able to get jobs"

"The minimum wage is bare minimum. Working around the training schedule is difficult"

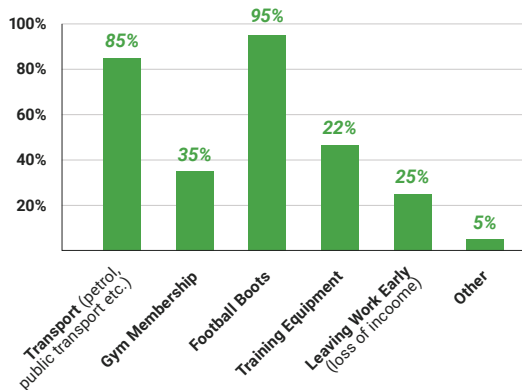
How satisfied are you with your Y-League related earnings?



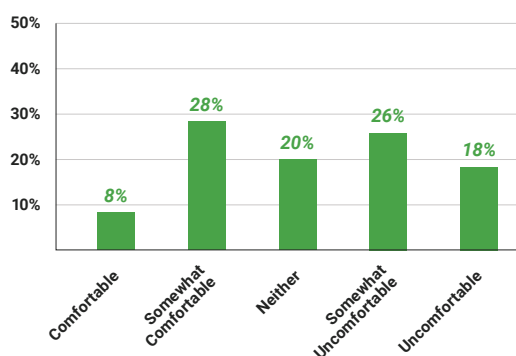
What would you consider to be an acceptable minimum wage for the Y-League season?



What are some of the costs you incur during the Y-League season?



How comfortable are you with your current financial position?



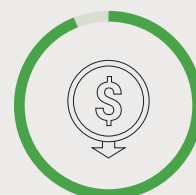
82%

of NYL players earn less than \$5,000 a year



71%

are unsatisfied with their current Y-League related earnings



94%

of players said their non-related Y-League earnings were less than \$19,000



95%

of players suggested football boots are a significant expense that is not covered by their clubs



44%

of players are unsatisfied with their current financial situation

**COURAGE
WORLD CLASS
INTELLIGENCE
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