

PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLERS AUSTRALIA

# SOCZEROOS 2022 QATAR FIFA WORLD CUP REPORT



# SUPPORTING THE PLAYERS BUILDING THE GAME



## Professional Footballers Australia

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In the spirit of reconciliation, Professional Footballers Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia.

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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# ABOUT THE REPORT

This Report represents the most comprehensive public post-tournament analysis of an Australian national team since the PFA compiled reports on the Socceroos' performances at the 2017 FIFA Confederations Cup and the Matildas' at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

The Report has two objectives. The first is to provide the PFA and the broader Australian football community with insights from the experiences of Australia's elite players at the pinnacle tournament of men's football.

The second is to provide a benchmark against which to measure the Socceroos' future participation in international competitions, in order to promote Australian football's objective of continuous improvement.

The Report incorporates the results of an exclusive and confidential post-tournament player survey developed by the PFA. 22 players from the World Cup squad completed the online survey, which included questions on

the players' experiences on and off the pitch in the tournament, as well as their career backgrounds and trajectories, and opinions on Australian football policy relevant to the national teams. Not every player completed every question.

The Report also includes findings from Twenty First Group research commissioned by the PFA, designed to track Australia's international competitiveness over time. Further, it taps into World Cup technical data from FIFA and Opta, and provides statistical context with the support of Australian football statistician Andrew Howe.

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

## Report Inputs



**PFA Player Survey**



**PFA Research in Partnership with Twenty First Group**



**Technical Data from FIFA and Opta**



**Australian Football Statistics Courtesy of Andrew Howe**



# FROM THE CO-CEOS



## **Welcome to the PFA's 2022 FIFA World Cup Socceroos Report.**

As a result of the deep engagement and contribution of our Socceroos members, this Report is the most comprehensive public analysis of the performances of an Australian national team at a major tournament.

The pages that follow illustrate that there is much to be proud of and that there is much the broader game can learn from this team and the staff, who helped deliver the Socceroos' best ever World Cup performance.



A world class environment, delivered and earned through collective bargaining, proved to be a key precondition for success. Football Australia has not handed this to players; rather, these conditions were fought for by generations of national team players who have pursued an environment essential to international success. Each generation that preceded this one should take great pride in the foundational role they have played in laying this platform for success at this World Cup.

To support the development of this Report, the players provided unfiltered insights into the clear and coherent game plan that enabled them to overcome Denmark and Tunisia and push the eventual world champions Argentina to their maximum.

The Report's economic analysis illustrates why international success is so critical to the game's ability to invest at all levels, whilst the players provide unique insights into the important strategic choices that should be made to ensure this investment is impactful.

Not everything that is important can be measured by results on the pitch. Our national team players have a long

and proud history of pursuing not just better conditions and a better game, but a better world. The Socceroos' public stance on Human Rights in Qatar – in the form of a video viewed at least one million times – was an act of extreme courage. They had much to lose but chose to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with fellow workers.

This action was part of a years-long engagement on this issue. Players took part in workshops led by international experts such as the Building and Wood Workers Union, the International Labour Organization, Amnesty, FIFPRO, and World Players Association. Critically, the players spoke directly to workers to understand their experiences in Qatar. These conversations highlighted the impact the Socceroos' platform could have on the workers' lives, so they chose to act.

In addition, the players elected to offset their unavoidable carbon emissions resulting from their participation at the World Cup Finals. They also carved off a significant percentage of their prize money to the PFA Footballers' Trust, where it will be invested into community football impact programs.

Through their work on and off the pitch, this group of players and staff showed us what our national teams can be: authentic and impactful leaders for our nation. Our sport doesn't need to play small. The Socceroos have shown us the path forward and if the game is willing to engage, this Report can help us to walk it.

Enjoy the report.

**Beau Busch & Kate Gill**



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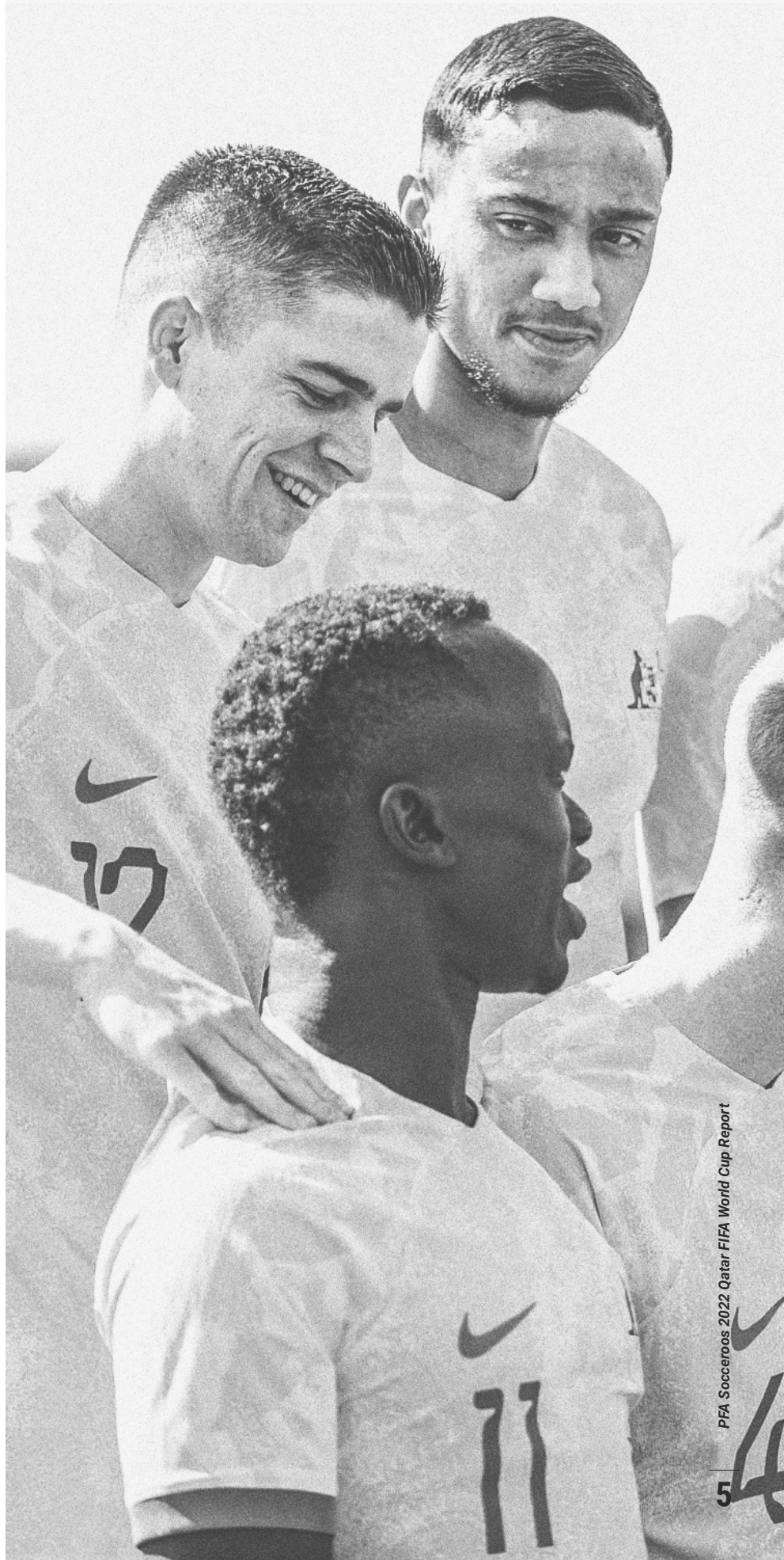
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Socceroos achieved their best-ever result at a FIFA World Cup, matching their Round of 16 finish from 2006 but with an unprecedented two group wins along the way. After a gruelling COVID-19-impacted qualification campaign, the players rose to the occasion on the pitch and inspired raucous scenes among a new generation of fans back home.

The players' feedback on their World Cup camp, revealed exclusively through this Report, was overwhelmingly positive. The working conditions and performance standards guaranteed by the National Teams Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) provided a strong platform for their performance, and due to the gender-equal CBA negotiated in 2019, this same foundation will be experienced by the Matildas at their home World Cup later this year.

To the credit of Football Australia (FA) and the Socceroos staff, the players' assessments of aspects beyond the CBA, such as the environment, team culture, and tactical preparation, were also very positive.

The technical section of the Report, which mixes match data with player feedback, finds that the team's performance on the pitch mirrored the intended gameplan on Graham Arnold's whiteboard. That plan appeared designed to maximise the chance of results given the squad's strengths and weaknesses, and this approach was evidently successful.

With a longer-term lens, it highlights areas where Australian football can continue to improve if we are to increase our capacity to progress even deeper into future tournaments. The final section of the Report reveals the players' belief that developing the next generation of national team

players requires policy interventions at childhood and grassroots level as the highest priority.

This squad was Australia's second youngest, and second least experienced, in our run of World Cups in the modern era. Around one third of tournament match minutes went to players aged 24 and under. FA's 2020 *Performance Gap* report had predicted that this World Cup would feature one of our oldest squads, so the emergence of a crop of regular starters and promising youngsters was a positive development.

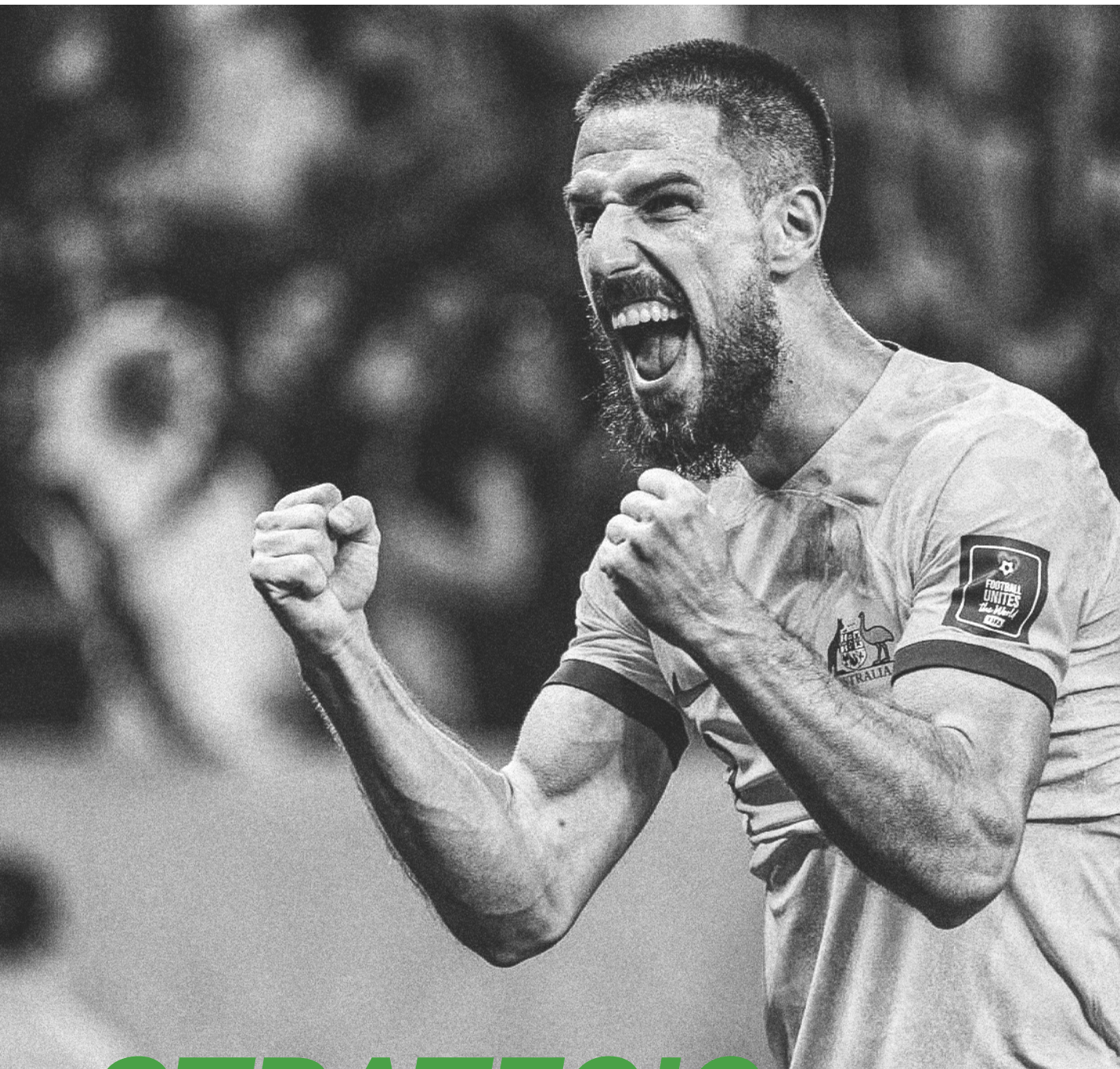
Analysis by FIFPRO highlighted the harms to player welfare caused by FIFA's unilateral decision to schedule the tournament mid-season, with a condensed window, and minimal preparation or recovery time. Australia's squad was relatively less affected in terms of cumulative load, but still subject to dangerously tight turnarounds in-tournament and the overlapping demands of club football.

Due to the pandemic, the Socceroos missed out on at least seven matches on home soil over the qualification campaign. This included high stakes qualifiers which history shows are the most attended Socceroos matches, meaning that not only were fans and players denied the chance to connect, but FA and the players suffered financially as well.

To the team's credit, their results in their neutral homes-away-from-home were flawless, and the additional time spent in Qatar during qualification may have even benefitted them for the tournament proper. But the Report reveals that more matches on Australian soil is one of the top priorities for the squad in the lead up to the 2024 Asian Cup, selected by 47% in the player survey.

The 2022 World Cup had significant direct benefits for the Australian football economy. In addition to the US\$1.5m in preparation money, FA received US\$7.4m of the US\$13m of prize money earned by the Round of 16 result, with the players distributing their share of US\$5.6m among those at the tournament and those involved in qualifying. The PFA estimates that Australian clubs will receive nearly US\$2m from FIFA's Club Benefits Programme.





# STRATEGIC CONTEXT



The Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup was a tournament of firsts. It was the first tournament held in the Middle East, in the Arab world and within a Muslim-majority country. It was the first time a team from Africa reached the semi-final stage, with Morocco qualifying for the last four, losing to eventual runners-up France.

It was also the first FIFA World Cup held during the winter months of the northern hemisphere, to avoid the extreme temperatures of Qatar's summer climate. The competition was moved to November-December, as opposed to the June-July scheduling of previous tournaments.

This change impacted the tournament's scheduling and the preparation time for players and teams. The tournament's 64 matches were held during a reduced window of 29 days, down from 32 days in recent tournaments. FIFA agreed this change as a compromise with club representatives (particularly from Europe) whose league schedules would be bisected by the winter tournament.

Whereas participating nations would usually have weeks-long pre-tournament camps, many players (including those in Europe's major leagues) were released from their clubs as late as a week before their first match in Qatar.

To accommodate for the truncated schedule and reduced preparation, FIFA introduced various regulatory amendments. Each nation was able to add an additional three players to their squads, with a total number of 26, while substitutions increased from three to five to assist with player load management. An additional substitution was allowed if knockout matches entered extra time.

The small geographic footprint was another unique feature of this tournament. All matches were played in and around Doha, so once teams had arrived in the country, no further air travel was required. This would have assisted with team recovery.

Qatar was also the first World Cup to introduce rules around permanent

substitutes in the event of a player concussion. Each team was permitted to use a maximum of one concussion substitute during a match, which was in addition to regular substitutions, but only applied when a player was diagnosed or deemed to have suffered a concussion by medical staff.

The tournament was the seventh and last with 32 teams (the tournament expanded from 24 to 32 teams in 1998). The tournament will be expanded further – to 48 teams – for the 2026 edition, which will be held in Mexico, the United States, and Canada. This change will see the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) take eight berths, up from the 4.5 which has been the allocation since Australia joined the AFC. Australia has qualified for the past four tournaments under that allocation, using the '0.5' intercontinental play-off route the past two times.

Adding the Socceroos' 2006 qualification via Oceania and another intercontinental play-off, Qatar was Australia's fifth consecutive tournament, having qualified for Germany (2006), South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014) and Russia (2018). It was also the Socceroos' best-ever finish in a World Cup, with the team ranked 11th overall after two Group Stage wins and a narrow Round of 16 loss against eventual winners, Argentina.



<b>Champions</b>	<b>Argentina</b>
<b>Runners-Up</b>	<b>France</b>
<b>Third-Place</b>	<b>Croatia</b>
<b>Fourth-Place</b>	<b>Morocco</b>
<b>11th</b>	<b>The Socceroos' highest-ever World Cup finish</b>
<b>142</b>	<b>Qatar 2022 was the highest-scoring FIFA World Cup in history with 142 goals netted across the 64 matches</b>



# TOURNAMENT PERFORMANCE

# TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Whilst it is not the primary aim of this Report to analyse the performances of Australia's players or staff, a high-level summary of the Socceroos' style of play at the tournament is an important component of the Report's usefulness in informing Australian football policy going forward.

This section is informed by the player survey and publicly available technical data from FIFA and Opta. The tactical approach described in the player survey was clearly reflected in the statistics, so we can immediately conclude the team's performance was underpinned by a well-defined and consistent gameplan which translated effectively from the coaching staff's vision to execution on the pitch.

Head Coach Graham Arnold's formation, tactical philosophy, and player selection were very stable across the tournament. A variation of 4-2-3-1 was deployed for the majority of minutes, including from the start of each match. Nine core players started all four matches.

The Socceroos' own descriptions of the gameplan speak to a strategy built on defensive solidity and transitional chance creation. Further, the way of playing emphasised togetherness, physical dominance, and mental strength.

These concepts were reflected in FIFA's technical data.<sup>1</sup> In all four matches, Australia made fewer passes than their opponents and at lower completion rates. They also took fewer shots than all their opponents, for a total of 25 for and 63 against. The Socceroos covered more total distance and distance at high speed than their opponents in every match, and made more defensive pressures than each opponent.

Opta's expected goals data, via

FBref.com, showed that the Socceroos created 0.5-0.6 xG in each match, scoring once in each.<sup>2</sup> France scored four goals from 4.0 xG, and Argentina scored twice from 1.6 xG, while Tunisia and Denmark were held to nil despite creating 0.9 and 0.6 xG respectively.

These data must be placed into context. Firstly, half of Australia's opponents were the two eventual finalists, making it unsurprising that teams of such quality would be able to dominate possession. Secondly, the Socceroos took the lead in the 23rd and 60th minutes of the other two matches, so the game state may have contributed to the team's and their opponents' approaches in the remaining minutes. However, as noted, the survey feedback implied that the tactical approach reflected in the data was intentional rather than situational or imposed by the opponent.

On this evidence, then, we can generally determine that this Socceroos team sought a competitive advantage through physical and mental attributes, and superior teamwork and tactical organisation. The strategic approach was to contain and nullify the opponent and capitalise on a limited number of high-quality opportunities on the break. The team either did not seek to or was not technically capable of dominating possession and generating a high number of chances. In terms of results, this approach was evidently successful.

It is not wise to make sweeping conclusions based on a small sample of matches, but it is arguable to say this strategy was expertly designed and executed in maximising the potential of this group in the microcosm of this World Cup, whilst simultaneously highlighting some limitations which may inhibit Australia's ability to progress even deeper into future tournaments on a consistent basis.

The implications for Australian football policy are twofold. Firstly, the preparation (especially physically and tactically) of the team should be celebrated. The standards and conditions around the squad gave the players a platform from which to perform at or close to their best as individuals and as a team. Secondly, the long-term policy focus for Australian football should be to continually improve the technical level of our players so that that dimension can match the other advantages this team exhibited.

## Preparation equals performance?

There is one final observation to make about the on-field results of the team during qualification and the tournament: results seemed to be at their best when the team spent more time together.

Whether it was during the qualifying mini-tournament forced by the pandemic (discussed in the Qualification Overview section of this Report), the Playoff series in Qatar, or during the Finals, the team won more during extended assemblies than in the 'fly-in-fly-out' phase of Third Round Qualifiers.

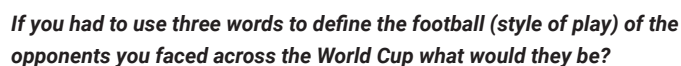
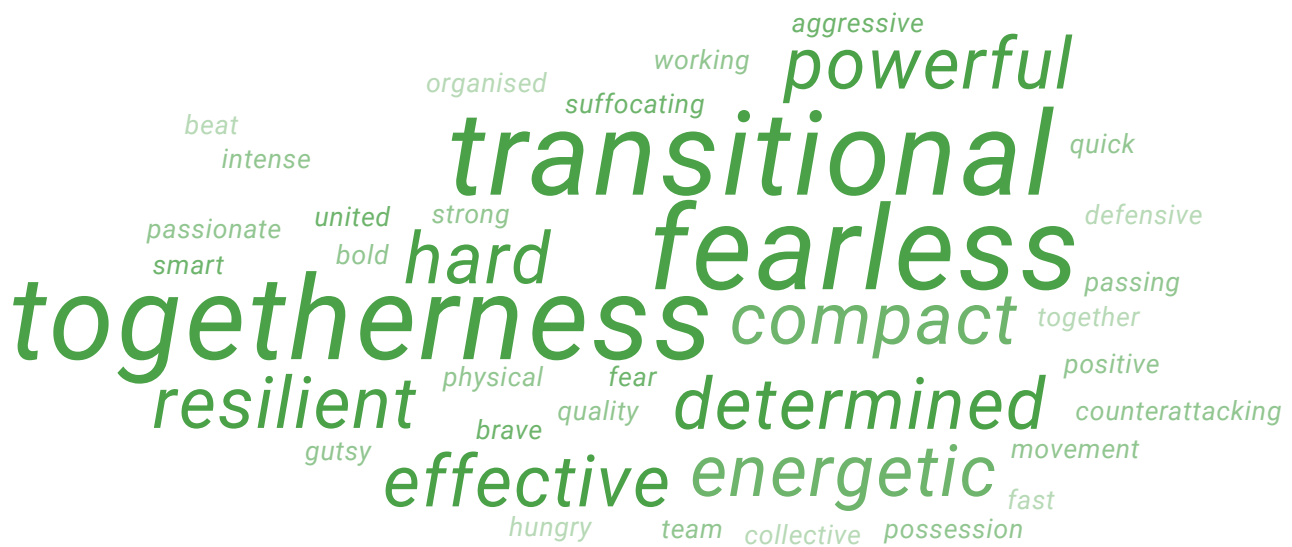
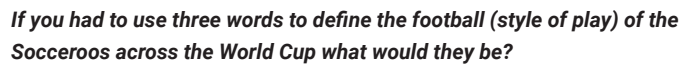
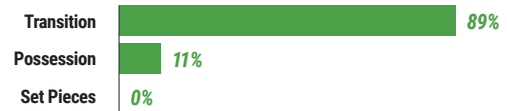
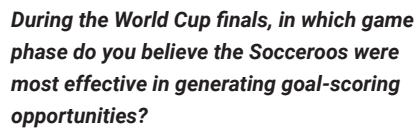
There is an obvious question of correlation versus causation, because the quality of Australia's qualifying opponents varied at these different junctures. However, given these findings surface Arnold's tactical work, the environment, and team cohesion as competitive advantages, it does make sense that extended assemblies would enable those factors.

This trend flags the importance of providing staff and players with as much time as possible in preparatory camps in advance of the Asian Cup in January 2024.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fifatrainingcentre.com/en/fwc2022/post-match-summaries/post-match-summary-reports.php>

<sup>2</sup> <https://fbref.com/en/squads/b90bf4f9/2022/matchlogs/c1/schedule/Australia-Men-Scores-and-Fixtures-World-Cup>





# PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The conditions surrounding the Socceroos in Qatar were underpinned by the CBA, which specifies minimum standards for travel, accommodation, training facilities, and staffing.

Through the CBA, the Socceroos and Matildas were able to inject the players' voice into their programs to ensure that investment was prioritised in the areas they believed would maximise their performances and give Australia a competitive advantage.

For example, the CBA guarantees that training facilities are elite and that support staff levels are comprehensive. The teams are afforded business class travel and five-star accommodation, with players not required to share rooms during the men's and women's World Cup final tournaments.

The consistency of standards for all assemblies throughout the cycle ensures that issues can be ironed out, and major tournaments can be tackled with a well-established, familiar, and

world class way of working for players and staff.

The CBA sets a floor of conditions which must be met. It does not preclude FA from making additional investments which may further enhance the environment, such as the headline-grabbing team barista imported for the camp (although the CBA does require coffee and lounge facilities).

The CBA also does not dictate decisions such as which accommodation, staff, or training base to select, among any number of options which technically comply with the CBA.

It is evident from the player feedback that FA was successful in creating a world class environment, in terms of the infrastructure, personnel, and the culture. For this, FA and coaching staff should be commended.

The players were asked to describe the World Cup camp in three words. Other than generally positive terms one might

associate with playing at a World Cup, such as "dreams" and "unforgettable", some answers which spoke to the environment were "logistically good", "fun", "focused", "comfortable", "hard work", and "family".

Due to the historic gender-equal CBA agreed in 2019, the Matildas will be provided with an identical baseline of standards for their World Cup campaign later this year.

With a new CBA due to be negotiated this year, the players will have another opportunity to work in partnership with FA to build on this foundation and enshrine further enhancements which future-proof our ability to compete with any nation off the pitch.







**What do you believe were the biggest strengths of the World Cup camp in preparing you to perform at your best?**  
(selected comments)

“

Calmness and relaxed environment

“

Medical care was incredible, and tactically everyone knew their role and responsibility

“

Physios and S&C's both in camp and in the lead up always looking out to help

“

Facilities, food, recovery

“

The togetherness of the group. The mentality.  
The managers influence of coaching style. The setup of the facilities. The mentality developed by the group

“

Having accommodation next to training pitch

“

Unity

“

Team culture

“

Training facility

“

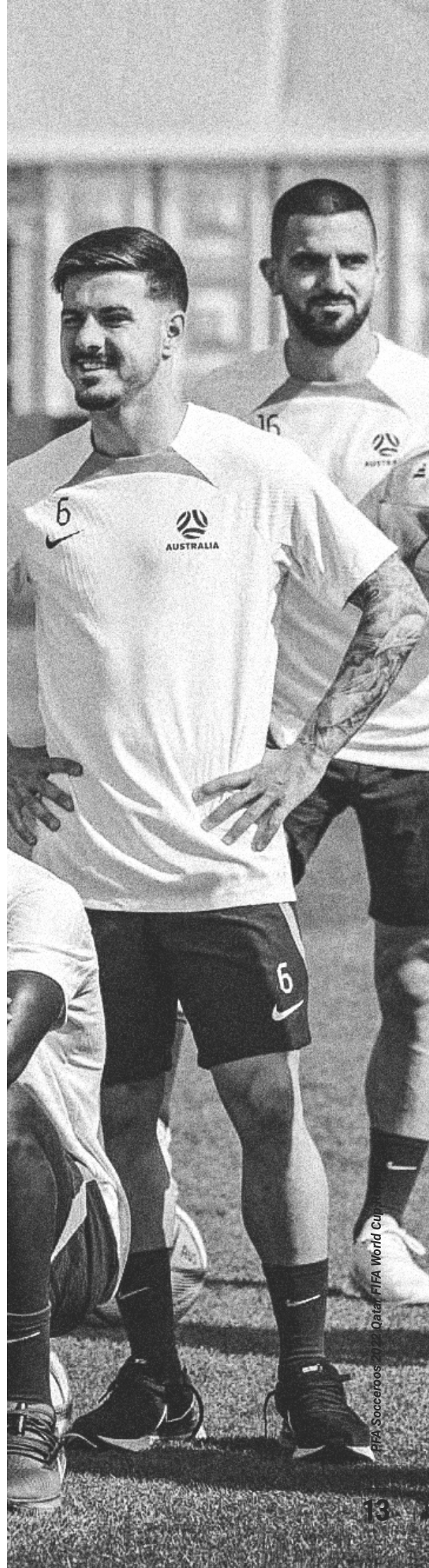
Going into a World Cup with the manager we had worked with for 4 years. Having a strong togetherness, belief, trust and understanding of individuals and environment

“

We were provided with everything we needed and have staff to cover all areas to help us wherever it's needed

“

World class staff and facilities





# SCHEDULING AND WORKLOAD

As outlined in the Strategic Context section, the unusual mid-season timing and truncated window of the 2022 World Cup was a major talking point. This aspect of workplace conditions is out of reach of the CBA – the scheduling was unilaterally decided by FIFA with no consultation with players or player organisations.

The tournament's 64 matches were held during a reduced window of 29 days, down from 32 days in recent tournaments. It was the shortest tournament since 1978, which only had 16 teams.

In addition, clubs were not required to release their players until a week before the first Group Stage matches, decreasing the extended preparation previously afforded to national teams. FIFPRO, the global body for professional footballers, found that 86% of World Cup players wanted at least 14 days preparation time.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, at the 2018 World Cup in Russia, Australia's players were able to assemble in a pre-tournament camp in Turkey more than a month before the tournament commenced.

The geography of Qatar did mean that once teams had arrived, there was no further air travel required, somewhat aiding with recovery. This will be in contrast with the next tournament held across the entire North American continent.

FIFPRO has released two reports analysing the impact of this scheduling on player workload: one pre-tournament, and one post-tournament.

## **Pre-tournament**

The pre-tournament report warned that the accumulated workload, hot conditions, and lack of post-tournament recovery time posed an unprecedented risk to player welfare, amid an ever-busier football calendar.

To illustrate the point, it listed the number of days between the last English Premier League match before the start of World Cups going back to 1990. It found that only once before was there less than 30 days break: the 20-day gap in 2002. In 2022, this number was seven.<sup>4</sup>

For completion, it is worth noting that not all nations' experiences were the same. For example, Iran's domestic league paused in late October 2022, giving their domestic-based players an extended preparation for the tournament.

Regarding the Socceroos, FIFPRO's report identified that Australia's squad was one of seven which actually may have had an underload going into the tournament, because Australia's squad had played the sixth fewest minutes of competing nations between 12th July 2021 and 24th October 2022. The Socceroos collectively played only two-thirds as many match minutes (90,741) over the period as the most overworked squad, Portugal (135,237).

It was not only nations with the bulk of their squads in top European leagues which had high workloads. Korea Republic was the fifth most-worked team, with over half of their squad based in the K League, which features 38 rounds compared to the A-League's 26 plus finals.

Australia's players also played the fourth least collective minutes in the immediate lead up to the tournament

(1st August 2022 to 24th October 2022).

This is partly explained by the relative shortness of the A-League, which started in early October and only played six rounds before breaking for the World Cup. Eight of the Socceroos squad were based in the A-League.

Of course, these aggregate results mask the individual experiences of players, with Australia's squad playing in a wide range of global leagues and each playing more or less regularly for their club sides.

The findings highlight the shortfall of match minutes provided by our domestic league compared to other competitions, while revealing that our squad had relatively fewer players exposed to dangerous cumulative workloads caused by FIFA's decision-making.

## **Tournament and Post-Tournament**

FIFPRO's post-tournament workload report revealed the harmful impact of the schedule on player welfare, including survey feedback and quotes from players regarding fatigue, injuries, lack of tactical preparation, and mental exhaustion.

It also found that the new interpretation of stoppage time meant that an average of 11.6 minutes were added to each match in 2022, around double the previous norm, resulting in yet more accumulated workload.

Due to Australia's Round of 16 finish, the impact on the Socceroos was limited to two main factors: the lack of time between matches, and the quick return to club football after the tournament.

<sup>3</sup> [https://fifpro.org/media/fl5pvvck/fifpro\\_pwm23\\_posttournamentreport.pdf](https://fifpro.org/media/fl5pvvck/fifpro_pwm23_posttournamentreport.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://fifpro.org/media/mo3jtev3/fifpro\\_pwm\\_world-cup-report-2022.pdf](https://fifpro.org/media/mo3jtev3/fifpro_pwm_world-cup-report-2022.pdf)

Australia played all four matches within the space of 12 days, with only two days' break between the final group match and the Round of 16 meeting with Argentina. Argentina had an identical schedule to Australia to that point. Coaching staff from both teams publicly criticised FIFA's scheduling during the tournament.

The A-League recommenced on 9th December, just five days following the Socceroos' tournament exit. FIFPRO's report highlighted Melbourne City's Mathew Leckie as one of the players with the least time between their final World Cup and their club return (seven days).

FIFPRO found 61% of players wanted at least 14-21 days to physically and mentally recover before club football resumed.

#### ***Asian Cup 2023 (in 2024)***

The AFC Asian Cup 2023 was originally scheduled to be played in China from June-July 2023. Due to the impacts of the pandemic, the AFC announced in 2022 that it would be relocated to Qatar, and, like the World Cup, pushed back from the mid-year window to the northern winter.

It will run from 12th January to 10th February 2024, in the middle of the leagues where most of Australia's squad will be based, including the A-League Men. So the same dynamics around the transition into the tournament and back to club football will be repeated for the second year running.





## Socceroos' Schedule

Sunday 13 November	Club competitions observe FIFA World Cup break
Monday 14 November	Socceroos commence assembly in Qatar
Tuesday 15 November	Seven day preparation
Wednesday 16 November	
Thursday 17 November	
Friday 18 November	
Saturday 19 November	
Sunday 20 November	
Monday 21 November	
Tuesday 22 November	Group Stage: Match 1 vs France
Wednesday 23 November	Three day recovery
Thursday 24 November	
Friday 25 November	
Saturday 26 November	Group Stage: Match 2 vs Tunisia
Sunday 27 November	Three day recovery
Monday 28 November	
Tuesday 29 November	
Wednesday 30 November	Group Stage: Match 3 vs Denmark
Thursday 1 December	Two day recovery
Friday 2 December	
Saturday 3 December	Round of 16 vs Argentina
Sunday 4 December	
Monday 5 December	
Tuesday 6 December	
Wednesday 7 December	
Thursday 8 December	
Friday 9 December	A-League Men recommences



# PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKING

World Cups invite commentary about a team's international competitiveness, and comparisons with previous generations. Naturally, the Round of 16 performance of Guus Hiddink's so-called 'Golden Generation' 2006 Socceroos team is often used as a reference point against which to judge subsequent campaigns.

Nothing can detract from the reality of the 2022 Socceroos' best-ever result. However, for the sake of informing football policy, it can be unwise to draw firm conclusions from a small sample of matches every four years.

For example, Italy won the World Cup in 2006, but failed to qualify for the past two tournaments. Between those, they were European champions. The actual underlying strength of Italy as a football nation has surely not fluctuated to these extremes.

FIFA rankings are one longer-term measure of nations' performances, but the methodology of these is oft criticised. One drawback is that

shoe-horning nations into a linear 'ranking', despite most nations never playing each other, creates noisy movement over time.

The PFA enlisted global sports intelligence company, Twenty First Group (TFG), to assess the quality of the Socceroos from 1998 to 2022.

TFG's bespoke rating system, which provides a score, rather than a ranking, reveals that Australia's level has remained relatively stable across that period, even as Australian football has experienced seismic changes in its administration, domestic competitions, and technical strategy.

A slight dip circa 2011-2012 opened the door for some of Asia's improving nations to catch up to and surpass Australia's score.

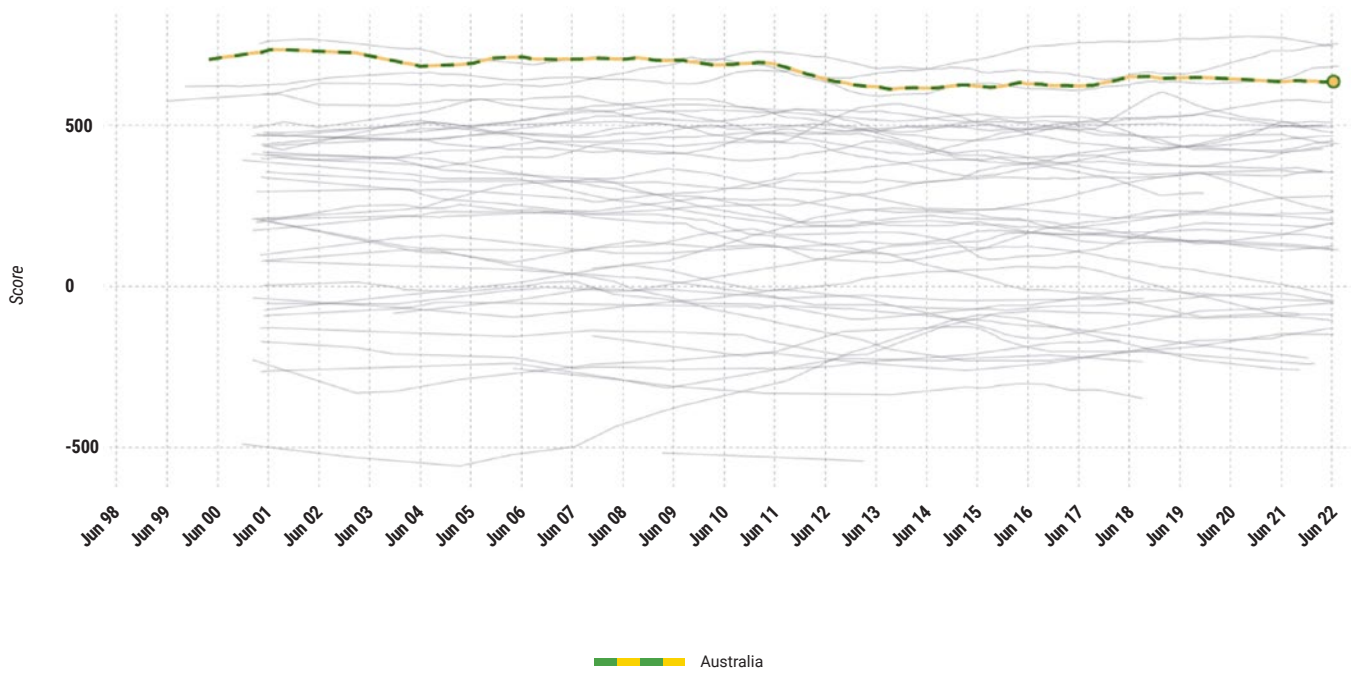
The PFA's landmark *Culture Amplifies Talent* study in 2019 was the most comprehensive analysis of the developmental pathways of Australia's 'Golden Generation' of male players.

It concluded that factors such as family, the home environment, and free play were at least as important to developing our elite players as those in the formal football pathway.

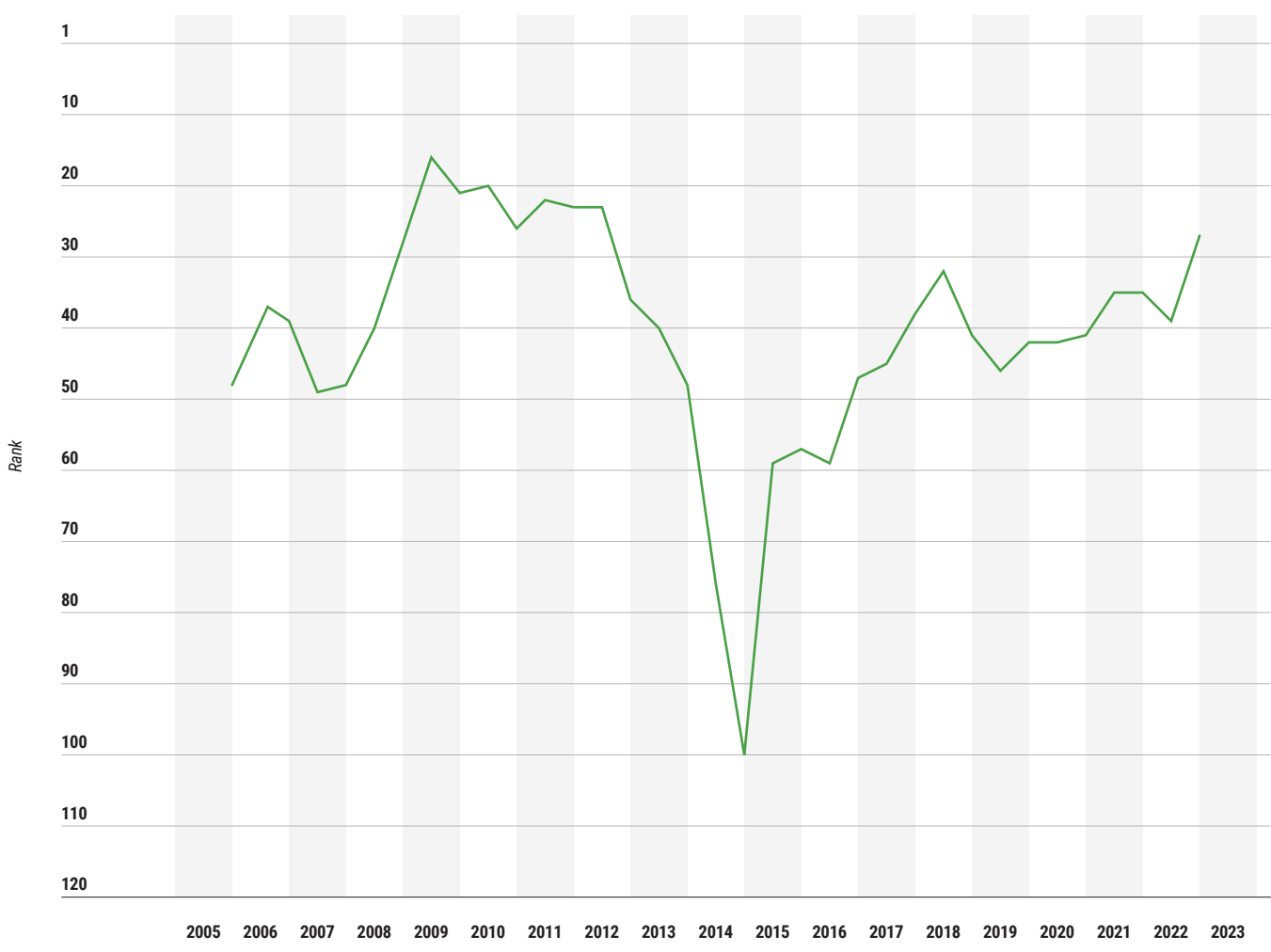
TFG's metric supports the theory that these underlying aspects of the country's football culture are key, since the standard of players relative to the world has remained fairly consistent despite the game's reformations. This suggests that policy-makers' focus should not be limited to players' experience within the four walls of official club football, nor to the later teen and adult years of their development.



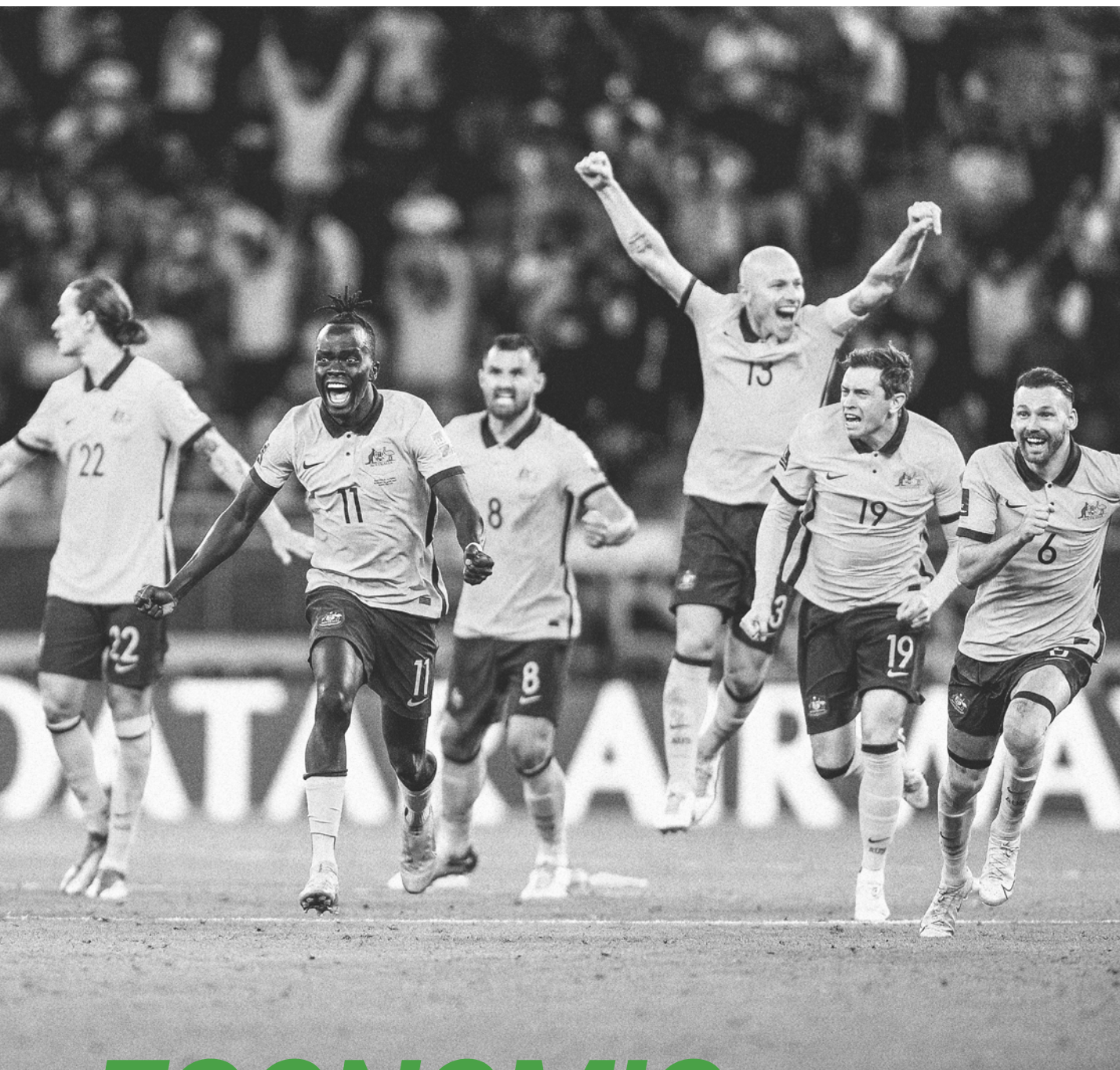
Twenty First Group's Rating of Asian National Teams by Year (1998-2022)



Australia's FIFA Men's World Ranking by Year (2005-2023)







# ***ECONOMIC IMPACT***



***The World Cup's broader impact on the Australian football economy is immeasurable, but we can provide a snapshot of direct streams of income provided by FIFA to our federation and clubs.***

***To begin, all participating nations received US\$1.5m in preparation costs ahead of the tournament. This money is used by the Member Associations (national federations) to cover logistical costs associated with participating.***

### **Prize money**

FIFA's prize money pot totalled US\$440m, up 10% from 2018. Australia earned US\$13m for finishing in the Round of 16. Teams eliminated at the Group Stage received US\$9m, while winners Argentina received US\$42m.

Australia's distribution of prize money is covered by the CBA. For the Men's World Cup, the players and FA agreed that the players would receive 40% of any Group Stage prize money, and 50% of any additional prize money they earned.

So, the Socceroos players shared in US\$5.6m, and FA retained US\$7.4m. The players agreed democratically how to fairly distribute their share between players at the tournament and those involved in qualifying.

To put the size of FA's share into

perspective, its windfall was over \$10m in Australian Dollars, well over 10% of the size of its revenues in FY22.<sup>5</sup>

FIFA has not formally announced the prize money pot for the 2026 Men's World Cup. However, its 2022 Financial Report states that the prize money and Club Benefits Programme (discussed below) combined will be US\$896m.<sup>6</sup> Separately and later, it announced that the Club Benefits Programme would increase from US\$209m in 2022 to US\$355m for the 2026 and 2030 tournaments, enabling an estimate of US\$561m of prize money for the 2026 World Cup.

This is a large increase from the US\$440m in Qatar, but 2026 will feature 16 additional teams. A rough calculation suggests that similar finishing positions could earn similar prizes from 2022 to 2026, if an additional 16 teams, in finishing places

33rd-48th, get around US\$7.5m each, absorbing the increase.

Based on the Socceroos' consistent qualifying record through the AFC, there's a high likelihood Australia will be one of Asia's eight qualifiers for 2026. This means the change to 48 teams allows Australian football to count on a baseline windfall with a high degree of certainty, whilst retaining the opportunity to achieve very significant upside if the team progresses.

These figures, and FIFA's rapid commercial growth, show that FA has both a strong safety net and a large carrot for healthy investment in the Socceroos' success now and into the future. This includes supporting the team itself to perform to its maximum, as well as developing the next generation to compete for the game-changing amounts on offer in the latter stages.

### **Club Benefits Programme**

In 2018 and 2022, FIFA disbursed US\$209m through its Club Benefits Programme, which compensates clubs for their role in preparing players to perform at the World Cup.

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>7</sup> Each player's allocation is then 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; for example, it 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 European Club Association (ECA), which included the ECA's compliance with FIFA's proposed International Match Calendar.

FIFA's briefing document for the 2018 Club Benefits Programme confirms the ECA acts "on behalf of all clubs globally in relation to the programme".<sup>8</sup>

So, 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.

In 2018, seven A-League clubs were among 416 worldwide which received Club Benefits. Australian clubs received a combined US\$1.17m, led by Melbourne City with US\$357k and Newcastle Jets with US\$297k.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.footballaustralia.com.au/sites/ffa/files/2022-11/Football%20Australia%20Financial%20Report%20for%20the%20year%20ended%2030%20June%202022.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2022/finances/2023-2026-cycle-budget-and-2024-detailed-budget/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/63651247df9b8ba2/original/bxkl7wgklygv0ar7scko-pdf.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/63651247df9b8ba2/original/bxkl7wgklygv0ar7scko-pdf.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/1748c00661affa91/original/z2lwdchdrknqzr9ht-pdf.pdf>

In 2018, a 'player day' was worth US\$8,530, which has risen to "approximately US\$10,000" for 2022, according to FIFA.<sup>10</sup> The condensed schedule for 2022 would have inflated the rate by reducing overall player days, especially since the official preparation period was only one week prior to the opening game instead of two weeks in 2018.

This increase in the daily rate would have been partially offset by the increase in squad sizes from 23 to 26 players, diluting the US\$209m pot across more players' clubs.

Even though the team 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 schedule, equating to around US\$210k each. Beating Argentina would have earned an extra six days in Qatar, or close to \$100k in Australian Dollars for the clubs of each player.

Nonetheless, the collective windfall for Australian clubs is set to be much larger than 2018. Distributions for 2022 are not yet public, but the next section of this Report will show that only three players from the 2018 Socceroos squad

were based in the A-League at the time of the tournament, compared to a record high of eight in 2022.

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

The PFA estimates that aggregate payments to A-League clubs will nearly double from 2018 to close to US\$1.9m, led by Grand Finalists Melbourne City and Central Coast with about US\$700k and US\$500k respectively. Final amounts are dependent on FIFA's methodology and the number of clubs worldwide which claim benefits.

FIFA is increasing Club Benefits to US\$355m for 2026 and 2030, while adding 16 teams and reducing squads back to 23 players. The impact on the player-day rate is likely to be a slight increase, making the change incremental for most nations. 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 uniquely football nature. Given the A-League'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.

## The FIFA Problem

While this section highlights the impact of FIFA's World Cup disbursements on Australian football, it is important to note that FIFA's process for deciding these figures is completely opaque and lacking in consultation with players or player organisations.

Yes, the figures are climbing, but so are the revenues FIFA generates off the players' backs. Its revenues from the 2022 World Cup were US\$6.3bn (up from US\$5.4bn in 2018), with tournament costs of US\$1.8bn (including prize money and Club Benefits).<sup>11 12 13</sup> FIFA projects record revenues of US\$11bn for the

2023-2026 cycle.<sup>14</sup>

There is no formalised or logical relationship between FIFA's revenues or profits and the amounts it returns to players, clubs, and Member Associations.

It's true that FIFA's various ongoing programs are funded almost exclusively from profits generated by the Men's World Cup (and, now that it treated as its own commercial entity, the Women's World Cup). But it also retains an exorbitant share of the profits for its reserves, which now sit at US\$4bn, and generally remains unquestioned in its spending and investment decisions.

Through collective bargaining, players in Australia can ensure they receive a fair share of the revenue they help generate here, and create a layer of accountability for those who effectively monopolise the football product. Additionally, where the players' voice is embedded in decision-making, outcomes are usually improved. This dynamic is not replicated at the global or regional levels.

FIFA's top-down, unilateral approach to governing the world's game is ultimately unsustainable and unacceptable, a fact which should not be hidden by the size of its disbursements.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/qatar2022/media-releases/fifa-distributes-more-than-usd-200m-to-clubs-across-the-world>

<sup>11</sup> <https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2022/finances/2019-2022-cycle-in-review/2019-2022-revenue/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/337fab75839abc76/original/xzshsoe2ayttyquuxhq0-pdf.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2022/finances/2019-2022-cycle-in-review/2019-2022-investments-expenses/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2022/finances/2023-2026-cycle-budget-and-2024-detailed-budget/>





# **PLAYER SELECTION & PROFILE**

FIFA increased the World Cup squad sizes to a maximum of 26, up from 23 in previous tournaments, as a concession in response to the tournament scheduling discussed elsewhere in this Report.

Graham Arnold was able to select a squad with three goalkeepers, nine defenders, six central midfielders, and eight forwards. Marco Tilio was a late injury replacement for Martin Boyle.

Tilio made it eight players who were currently playing in the A-League, a record high. A further 12 players had played in the A-League previously, leaving only six who had never featured domestically.

Only two hailed from Europe's 'Big 5' leagues, in contrast with the 12 from the 2006 squad. Only two were based at Asian clubs, the lowest since 2006.

Arnold's team selections were very stable, with only 20 of the 26 players used during the tournament. Only four nations used fewer, and all of those played only three matches.

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### **Age and Experience**

It was a relatively inexperienced squad, in terms of international caps. Only Ghana had a squad with fewer average caps per player (18.6) than Australia (20.7) at the tournament. It was also low compared to Australia's other World Cup squads in the modern era, besides Ange Postecoglou's heavily refreshed squad in 2014 (17.8 caps).

Despite this, it was not a particularly young squad, with its average age of 27.2 sitting middle of the pack at this tournament. In terms of modern Australian squads, though, it was again the youngest after 2014.

Australia did benefit from eight players having had previous World Cup Finals appearances, the highest since 2010.

Part of the reason for the lack of caps is that the final squad was a slight departure from the cohort used throughout the long qualifying campaign. Five players in the final 26 had not appeared in World Cup Qualifiers, while some of Arnold's most-used players in qualifying did not appear in the Finals squad, due to injury, withdrawal, or non-selection

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### **Performance Gap?**

In its 2020 *Performance Gap* report, Football Australia predicted that Australia would "likely (have) one of its oldest squads at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022" due to a lack of international minutes going to players born between 1993 and 1999.<sup>15</sup> This turned out to be incorrect, with Arnold selecting our second youngest World Cup squad.

There is evidence that there was something of a 'gap' for players aged 25-28, with only six players in the squad at those ages, and only two of those developed in the A-League.

However, the minutes played chart below shows that a crop of 24-year-olds since emerged to become regular starters in this successful tournament, in the form of Harry Souttar (360 minutes), Kye Rowles (360), Riley McGree (265), and Keanu Baccus (114). The latter three of these four were developed in the domestic competition.

Another A-League product, Garang Kuol, became the youngest player to appear in the World Cup knockout stages since Pele in 1958, before securing a transfer to Newcastle United in January.

Since the *Performance Gap* was released, the A-League has also seen

an increase in the share of match minutes going to younger players, and the emergence of other talents such as Jordan Bos and Nestory Irankunda, who were called up by Arnold for the senior squad in March 2023.

These developments provide a promising signal that the A-League is capable of providing a pathway into the national team under current settings.

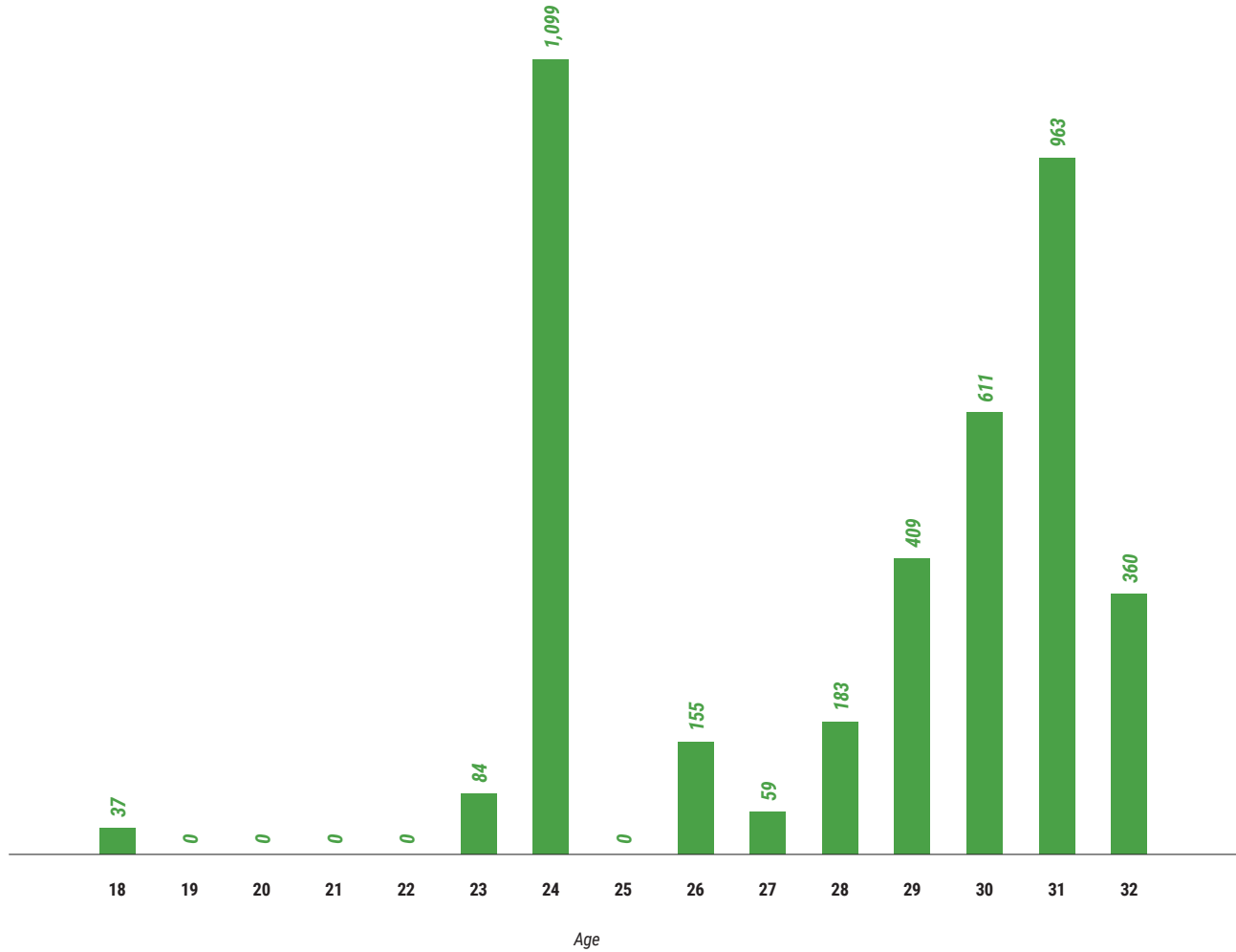
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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.footballaustralia.com.au/sites/ffa/files/2020-11/The%20Performance%20Gap.pdf>



# MATCH MINUTES

Socceroos' 2022 World Cup Match Minutes by Age



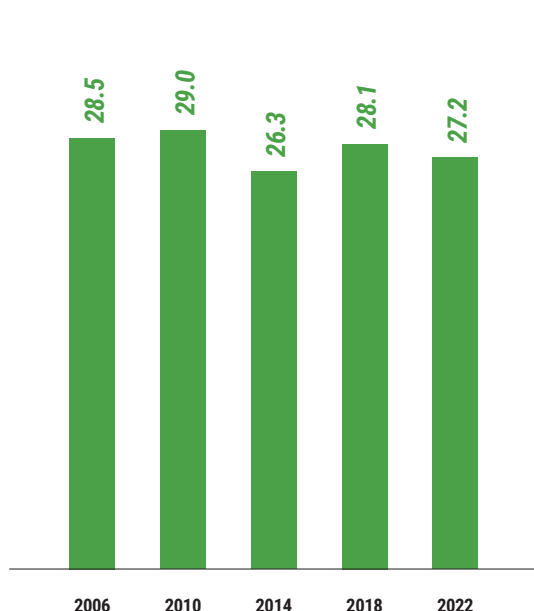
# WORLD CUP SQUAD

Position	No.	Player	Club	Age	Caps	World Cup Match Minutes	Qualifying Match Minutes
GK	1	Mat Ryan	FC Copenhagen (DEN)	30	75	360	1,649
GK	12	Andrew Redmayne	Sydney FC (AUS)	33	4	0	83
GK	18	Danny Vukovic	Central Coast Mariners (AUS)	37	4	0	90
DEF	2	Miloš Degenek	Columbus Crew (USA)	28	38	183	914
DEF	3	Nathaniel Atkinson	Hearts (SCO)	23	5	84	270
DEF	4	Kye Rowles	Hearts (SCO)	24	3	360	210
DEF	5	Fran Karacic	Brescia (ITA)	26	11	93	498
DEF	8	Bailey Wright	Sunderland (ENG)	30	27	17	300
DEF	16	Aziz Behich	Dundee United (SCO)	31	53	360	1,312
DEF	19	Harry Souttar	Stoke City (ENG)	24	10	360	887
DEF	20	Thomas Deng	Albirex Niigata (JPN)	25	2	0	0
DEF	24	Joel King	OB (DEN)	22	4	0	180
MID	10	Ajdin Hrustic	Hellas Verona (ITA)	26	20	62	1,232
MID	13	Aaron Mooy	Celtic (SCO)	32	53	360	822
MID	14	Riley McGree	Middlesbrough (ENG)	24	11	265	184
MID	17	Cameron Devlin	Hearts (SCO)	24	1	0	0
MID	22	Jackson Irvine	St Pauli (GER)	29	49	354	1,528
MID	26	Keanu Baccus	St Mirren (SCO)	24	1	114	0
FWD	6	Marco Tilio	Melbourne City FC (AUS)	21	5	0	50
FWD	7	Mathew Leckie	Melbourne City FC (AUS)	31	73	333	746
FWD	9	Jamie Maclaren	Melbourne City FC (AUS)	29	26	55	480
FWD	11	Awer Mabil	Cadiz (ESP)	27	29	24	868
FWD	15	Mitchell Duke	Fagiano Okayama (JPN)	31	21	270	581
FWD	21	Garang Kuol	Central Coast Mariners (AUS)	18	1	37	0
FWD	23	Craig Goodwin	Adelaide United (AUS)	30	10	234	185
FWD	25	Jason Cummings	Central Coast Mariners (AUS)	27	1	35	0

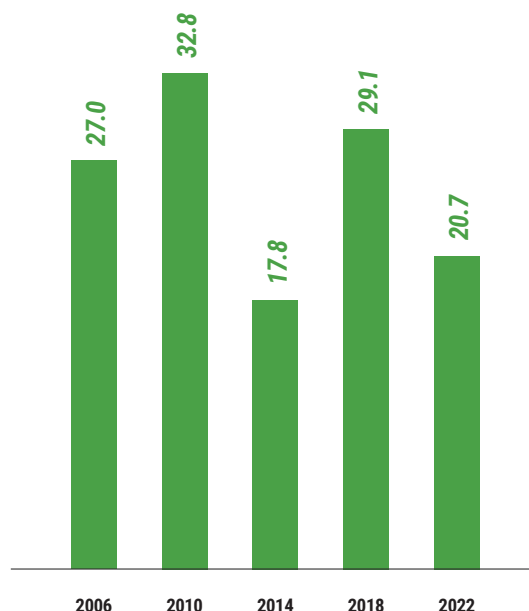


# AGE & EXPERIENCE

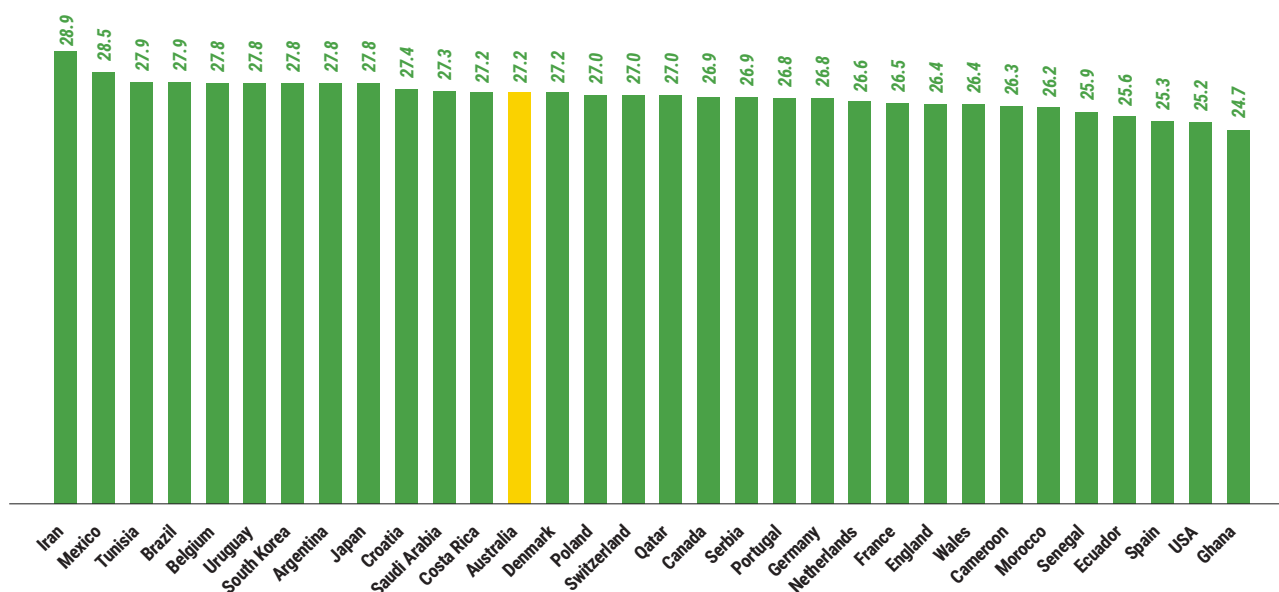
Average Ages of Soccerroos World Cup Squads



Average Caps of Soccerroos World Cup Squads

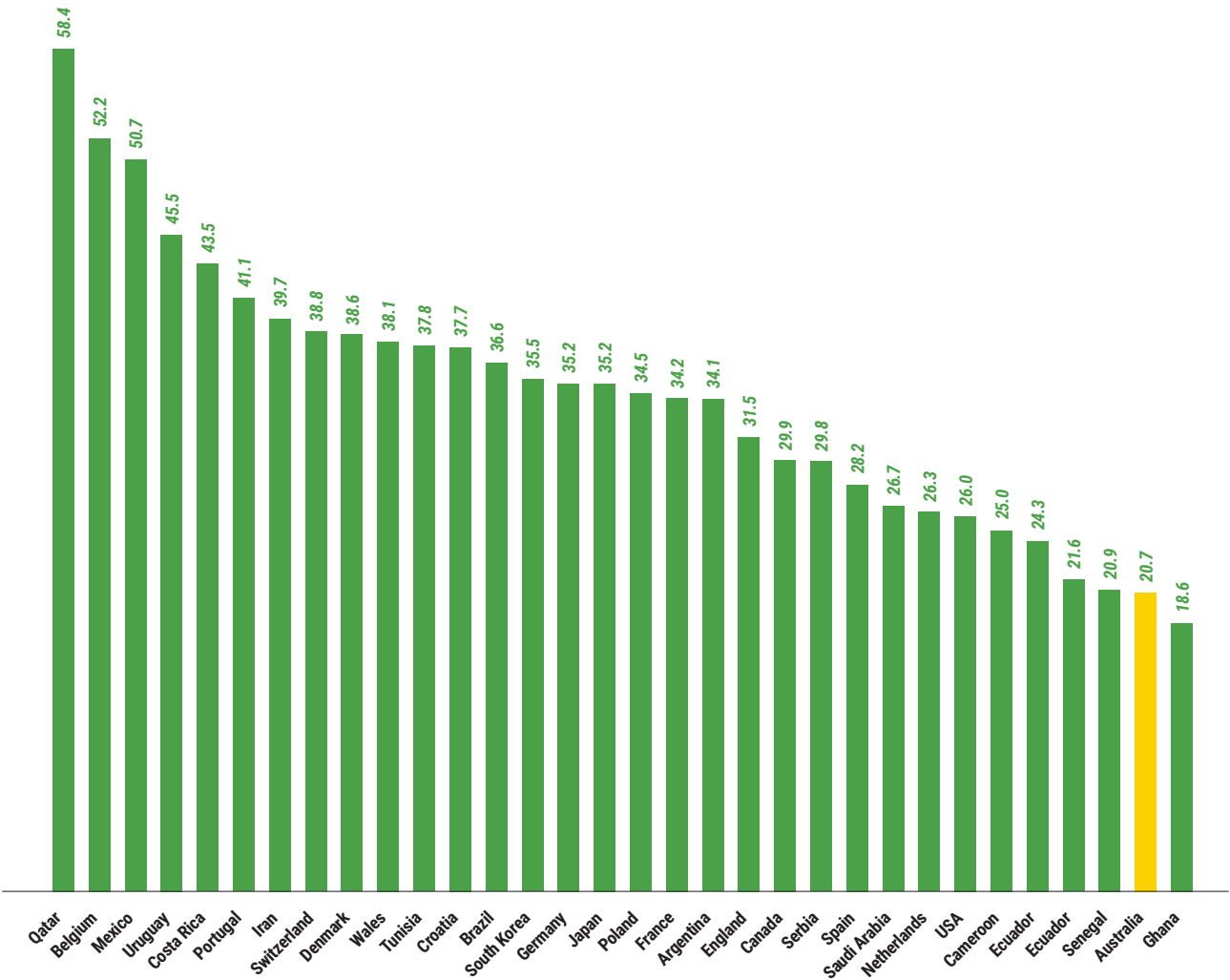


Average Ages of 2022 World Cup Squads

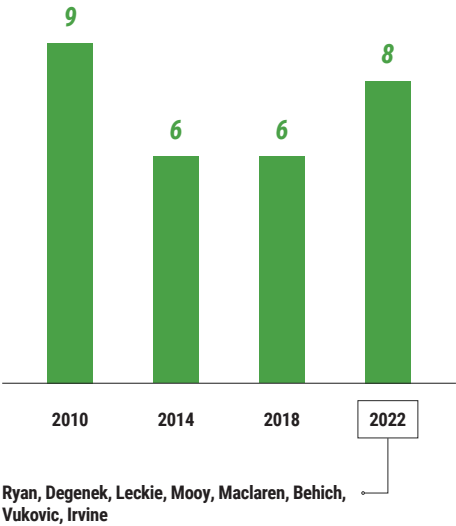


**Note:** Comparative analysis in this Report is limited to modern World Cups for practical policy reasons. The PFA does not wish to diminish the achievements or legacy of the 1974 World Cup Soccerroos.

Average Caps of 2022 World Cup Squads



Number of Australian players with previous FIFA Men's World Cup experience



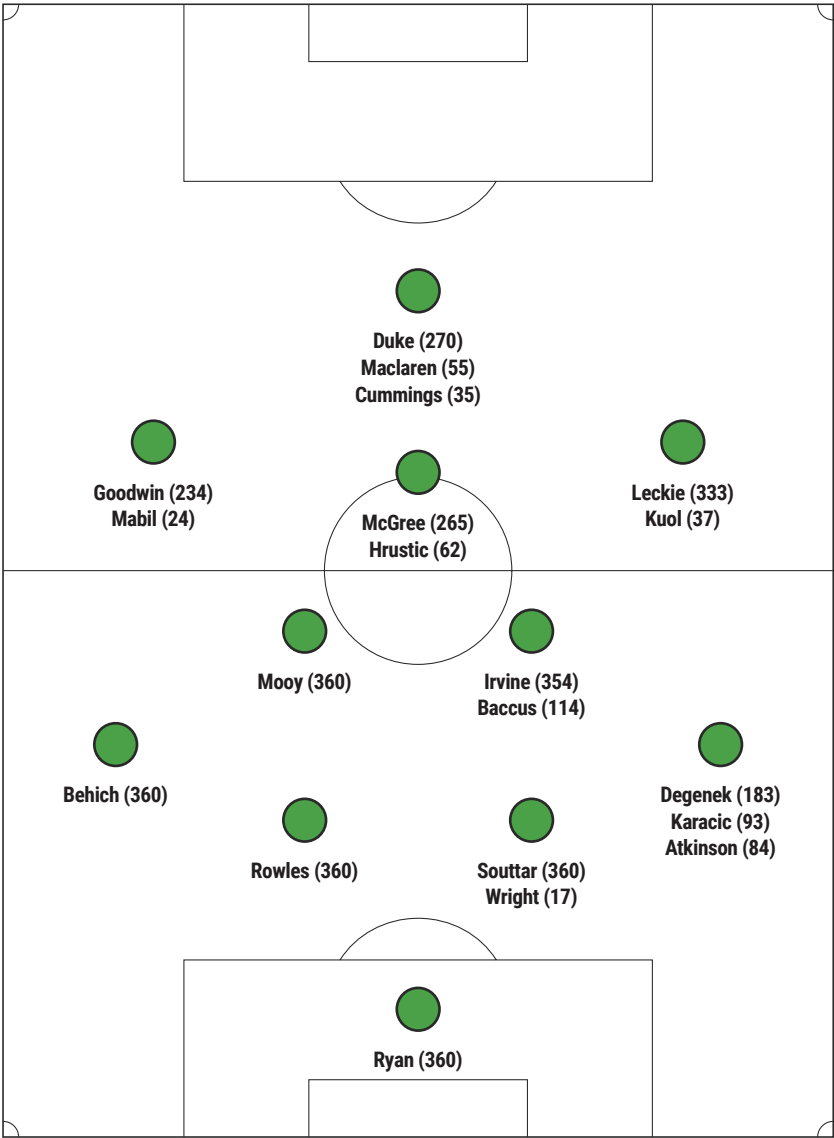


Player Source Leagues

League	2006 Germany	2010 South Africa	2014 Brazil	2018 Russia	2022 Qatar
'Big 5'	12	6	2	3	2
Other	8	12	11	13	14
Asia	0	3	3	4	2
A-League	3	2	7	3	8
Total	23	23	23	23	26

'Big 5' includes the top divisions of England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain  
'Other' includes all other European leagues and the MLS

Positional Selections



Irvine (#6 and #10) and McGree (#10 and left wing) played in multiple positions







# QUALIFICATION OVERVIEW





**1,008**

*Length in days of the FIFA World Cup qualification campaign for the Socceroos*



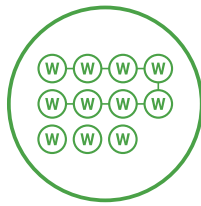
**20**

*Total number of matches Australia played in FIFA World Cup Qualifying*



**3rd**

*Final placing of Australia in Group B of Third Round AFC Qualifying*



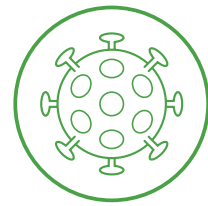
**11**

*The Socceroos set a FIFA World Cup qualifying record with 11 consecutive wins*



**5**

*The Socceroos' qualification for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar was their fifth consecutive*



**567**

*Days between the Socceroos' fourth and fifth qualifiers due to a pause in international football due to the COVID-19 pandemic*



# THE PATHWAY

The Socceroos' journey to the FIFA World Cup finals in Qatar was the most elongated in the team's qualifying history, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of international travel restrictions and Australian government restrictions, the Socceroos' qualifying campaign stretched across 1,008 days.

In addition, restrictions meant the majority of Australia's 'home' fixtures were not played in Australia. The team was also denied the opportunity to participate in Copa America 2021 (which was delayed from 2020) as a guest entrant, due to the rescheduling of AFC Qualifying.

The Socceroos were drawn in Group B of the Second Round of AFC Qualifying following seeding based on FIFA World Cup Rankings, commencing their campaign on 10th September 2019 with a 3-0 win over Kuwait.

Australia ultimately dominated Group B with a perfect record of eight wins, scoring 28 goals and conceding two. Centre back Harry Souttar was the equal top-scorer in the group with six goals.

This performance was overshadowed by the fact there was an 18-month hiatus halfway through group play due to COVID-19. Following Australia's Second Round win over Jordan in November 2019, the Socceroos did not recommence their qualification campaign until June 2021. The AFC staged a centralised, accelerated mini-tournament in Kuwait to play out the rest of the group fixtures, in which Australia played four matches in 12 days.

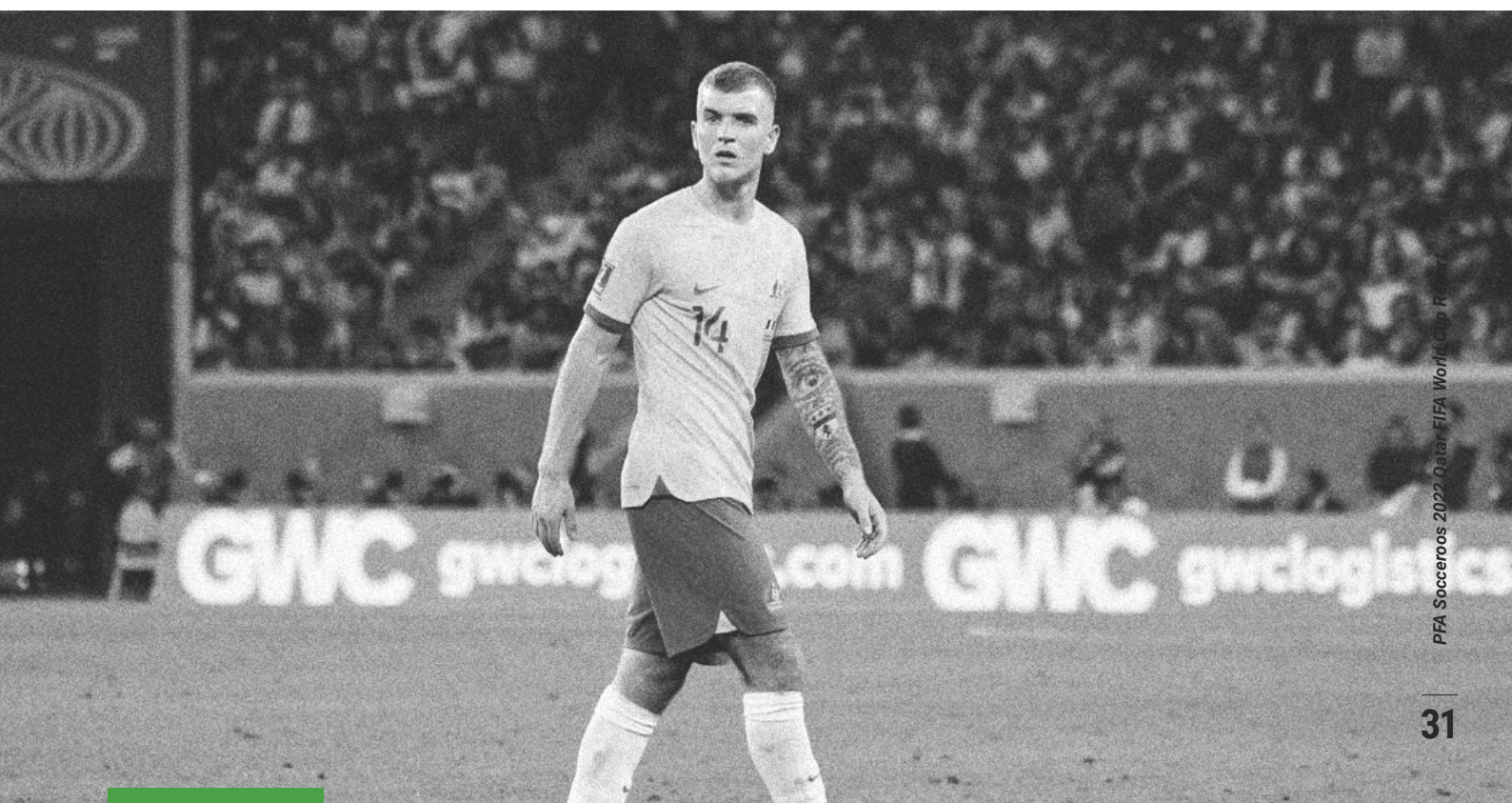
With three wins to open Group B in the AFC Third Round, the Socceroos set a world record of 11 consecutive FIFA World Cup qualifying wins.

However, the team won just one of its remaining seven Group B matches, falling to third in the group and into the AFC playoff match for the second consecutive qualifying campaign.

As in 2018, the team was forced to progress through the challenging pathway of the AFC playoff and then the intercontinental playoff. Unlike four years earlier, when those ties were two-legged, home and away formats, they were both played as single ties on neutral ground in Qatar.

Australia defeated United Arab Emirates 2-1 and then Peru 5-4 on penalties after a 0-0 draw on the 7th and 13th of June 2022, respectively.

With the AFC allocation rising from 4.5 to eight teams for future 48-team World Cups, the likelihood is the Socceroos will directly qualify for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, based on the Socceroos' historic qualifying record.



Most Match Minutes in Qualifying

Player	Minutes Played	Appearances
Mat Ryan	1,649	18
Jackson Irvine	1,528	17
Aziz Behich	1,312	15
Trent Sainsbury	1,254	14
Ajdin Hrustic	1,232	17
Martin Boyle	1,225	15
Rhyan Grant	1,062	13
Miloš Degenek	914	12
Harry Souttar	887	10
Awër Mabil	868	17

Player selected in World Cup Finals squad



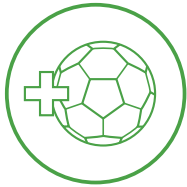
20

The number of qualifying games played in order to reach the World Cup Finals



13

The number of matches won during qualification (4 draws, 3 losses)



45

The number of goals scored over the campaign (2.25 per game)



12

The number of goals conceded over the campaign (0.6 per game)

Campaign Result Timeline

	Date	Opponent	Result	GF / GA
Second Round	10/9/19	Kuwait (A)	W	3 - 0
	10/10/19	Nepal (H)	W	5 - 0
	15/10/19	Chinese Taipei (A)	W	7 - 1
	14/11/19	Jordan (A)	W	1 - 0
	3/6/21	Kuwait (N)	W	3 - 0
	7/6/21	Chinese Taipei (N)	W	5 - 1
	11/6/21	Nepal (N)	W	3 - 0
	15/6/21	Jordan (N)	W	1 - 0
Third Round	2/9/21	China PR (N)	W	3 - 0
	7/9/21	Vietnam (A)	W	1 - 0
	7/10/21	Oman (N)	W	3 - 1
	12/10/21	Japan (A)	L	1 - 2
	11/11/21	Saudi Arabia (H)	D	0 - 0
	16/11/21	China PR (N)	D	1 - 1
	27/1/22	Vietnam (H)	W	4 - 0
	1/2/22	Oman (A)	D	2 - 2
	24/3/22	Japan (H)	L	0 - 2
	29/3/22	Saudi Arabia (A)	L	0 - 1
Playoffs	7/6/22	UAE (N)	W	2 - 1
	13/6/22	Peru (N)	D	0 (5) - 0 (4)
Finals	22/11/22	France (N)	L	1 - 4
	26/11/22	Tunisia (N)	W	1 - 0
	30/11/22	Denmark (N)	W	1 - 0
	3/12/22	Argentina (N)	L	1 - 2

(H) Home (A) Away (N) Neutral



# IMPACT ON HOME FIXTURES

Due to the impacts of COVID-19, Australia missed out on at least seven home matches throughout AFC Qualifying. This included three in the Second Round, two in the Third Round, and two across the AFC and Intercontinental Playoffs, which were turned into single ties on neutral ground instead of two-legged home and away ties.

The three Second Round matches were absorbed by a mini-tournament in Kuwait, so one of the three actually became another away match, given Kuwait was one of the opponents the Socceroos would have hosted in Australia otherwise. In the Third Round, an away fixture in China was moved to neutral United Arab Emirates.

Australia also played a friendly against Jordan in neutral Qatar in advance of the two playoffs in June 2022, a match which possibly could have been at home under normal circumstances.

The Socceroos won all five qualifiers they would otherwise have hosted, and ultimately progressed through the revised playoff format, so there is no retrospective concern about the impact on results. The team should be commended for navigating these circumstances so effectively.

The additional time the team was forced to spend in Qatar as a 'home away from home' may even have provided a competitive advantage for the World Cup Finals.

The greater impact on the team and Australian football was the missed opportunity to play marquee home fixtures in front of large crowds, in terms of both the immediate financial loss and the broader connection between fans and the team.

The Socceroos only appeared in front of

home fans seven times in 2018-2022, just once more than in 2017 alone. In the three years between November 2018 and November 2021, the only home match was a Second Round qualifier against Nepal, a lower-profile fixture.

After the unbundling of the A-Leagues from FA, the national teams are the governing body's primary commercial engines. Brand research shows the Socceroos and Matildas are both among Australia's most-loved sports teams, so there is inherent interest whenever they play on home soil.

But there is a different model for each team with regards to elevating fan interest in home fixtures. For the Matildas, the relatively clear women's international match calendar allows FA to regularly attract world class opponents for friendlies and mini-tournaments. The Matildas' largest home crowd to date was a friendly against United States in 2021.

For the Socceroos, the interminable continental competitions and qualifiers makes it more challenging to attract marquee European or South American opponents for friendlies. History shows it is the jeopardy of competitive play in our own qualifiers which heightens interest.

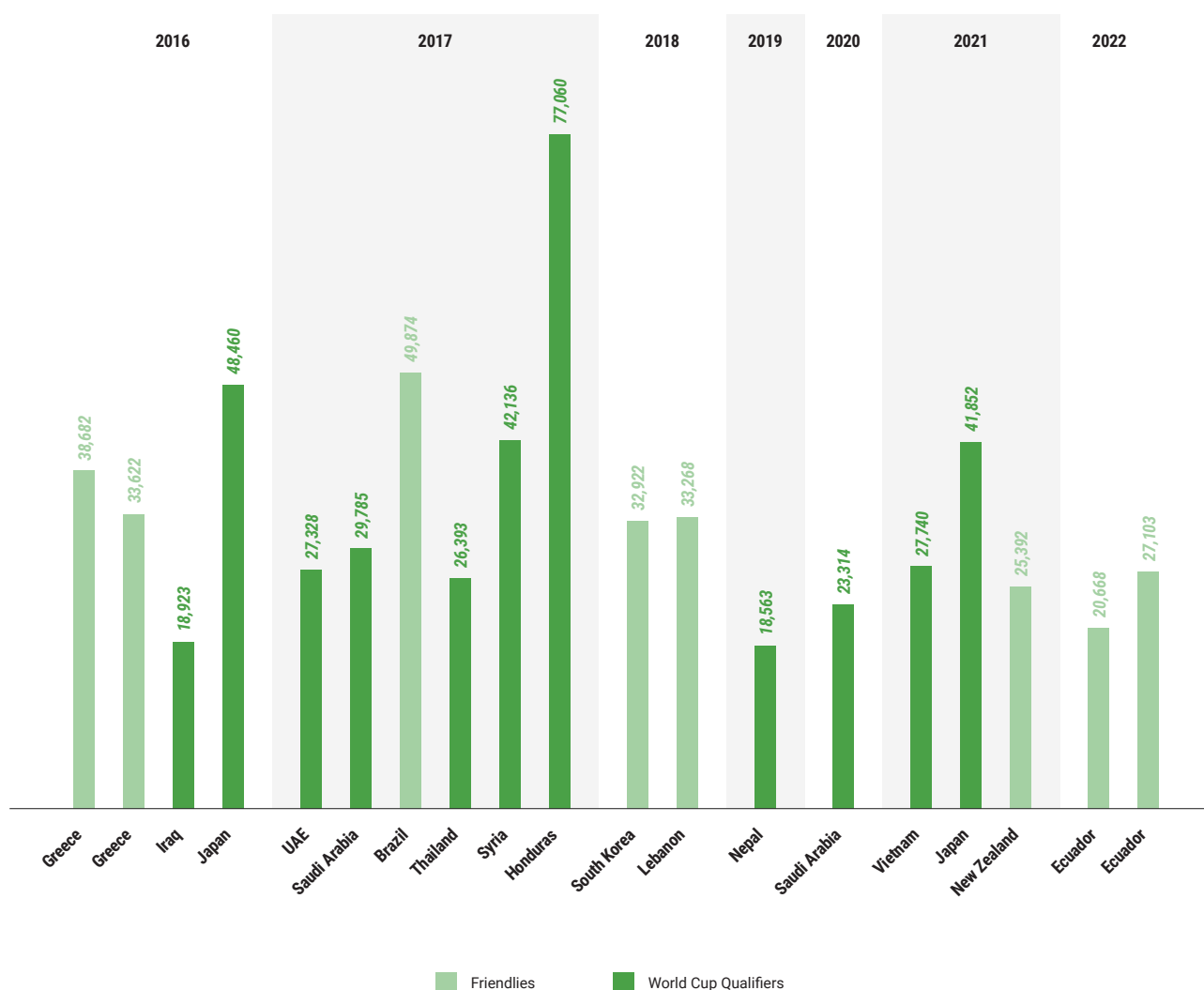
Analysis of Socceroos attendances over the past seven years shows four of the five matches to exceed 40,000 were World Cup Qualifiers, including the 77,060 who witnessed the 2017 Intercontinental Playoff home leg against Honduras in Sydney. A repeat of this fixture, this time against Peru, was one of the matches denied by COVID-19 in this cycle.

The CBA features a revenue share model where the Socceroos and Matildas are paid a set percentage

of the revenue they generate. Match tickets are one of the revenue streams included, so the absence of these seven or so home fixtures had a negative impact on FA's business and the players alike.

Looking ahead, the Socceroos' return to Australian stadia will provide a welcome boost to the game's finances in its post-pandemic recovery, especially on the back of their success in Qatar, and, more importantly, an opportunity for fans to build further connection with the team and players.

## Socceroos Home Crowds Since Mid-2016



# COPA AMERICA

COVID-19 also denied the Socceroos an historic opportunity to participate as one of the two guest entrants in the Copa America.

South America's continental tournament usually features two outside nations to expand its numbers to 12, providing a more balanced draw. Australia was invited along with Qatar for the 2020 edition, which was delayed

to mid-2021 due to the pandemic. The AFC's revised World Cup Qualifying schedule clashed with the new dates, forcing Australia to withdraw.

The competition would have provided a unique and valuable opportunity for the Socceroos to prepare for Qatar with at least three matches against quality opponents in a World Cup-like tournament environment.

It also would have presented the opportunity to compete for a share of a total prize pool worth US\$19.5 million, of which players would have received a set share as negotiated in the National Teams CBA.



**LOOKING  
AHEAD**



# Asian Cup Preparations

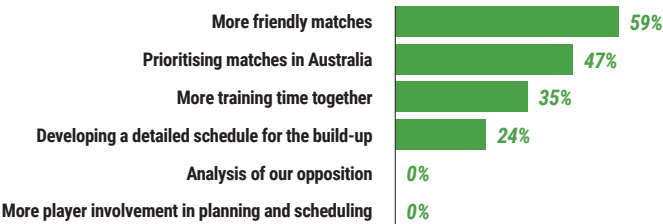
The post-tournament player survey included questions about players' experiences in Qatar, their developmental pathways, and the path ahead for the team. This section surfaces those latter results.

Regarding preparation for the 2024 Asian Cup, the players were focused on building on their progress in 2022 with a preference for more matches against the right opponents to maximise their performance.

Nearly half the players (47%) believed that prioritising matches in Australia should be a focus, presumably to make up for the COVID-enforced shortfall described in the previous section.



**Ahead of the Asian Cup, what do you believe should be the focus of the National Teams program?** (multiple answers allowed)



**Comments regarding Asian Cup 2024 preparations:**

“

More games to help us prepare

“

Stability around the group with the current environment. Scheduling of the opposition we face, decisions directed to growth of team playing strong opposition and not based on financial income

Planning around opposition friendly matches geared towards the type of tournament around the corner eg. Playing the big Asian cup opponents in build up to the tournament, then playing big European or South American opponents in other friendlies further away from tournaments to give that top level experience and exposure to the group to better prepare us for the big tournaments when they roll around

“

Prepare tactically in the friendlies as we intend to play at Asian Cup

“

Just a good balance of playing preferably big Asian cup contenders in the buildup and playing European and South American opponents in the earlier friendlies. Trying to adopt similar camp logistics to what we had for the World Cup



## Producing the Next Generation

We asked the Socceroos what areas Australian football should be prioritising to produce the next generation of Socceroos and Matildas.

From the list of options provided, the players chose issues impacting young children entering the sport as the highest priorities, and issues impacting older players such as professional clubs and coaches as relatively lower priorities (though still important).

The PFA's 2019 landmark study into the developmental histories of the Socceroos' 'Golden Generation', *Culture Amplifies Talent*, found that factors in childhood such as family influence, the home environment, and an early love affair with the ball were key ingredients

in nurturing elite Australian male players.<sup>16</sup>

The Socceroos' responses appear to agree with the research on the primary importance of fostering a connection from a younger age.

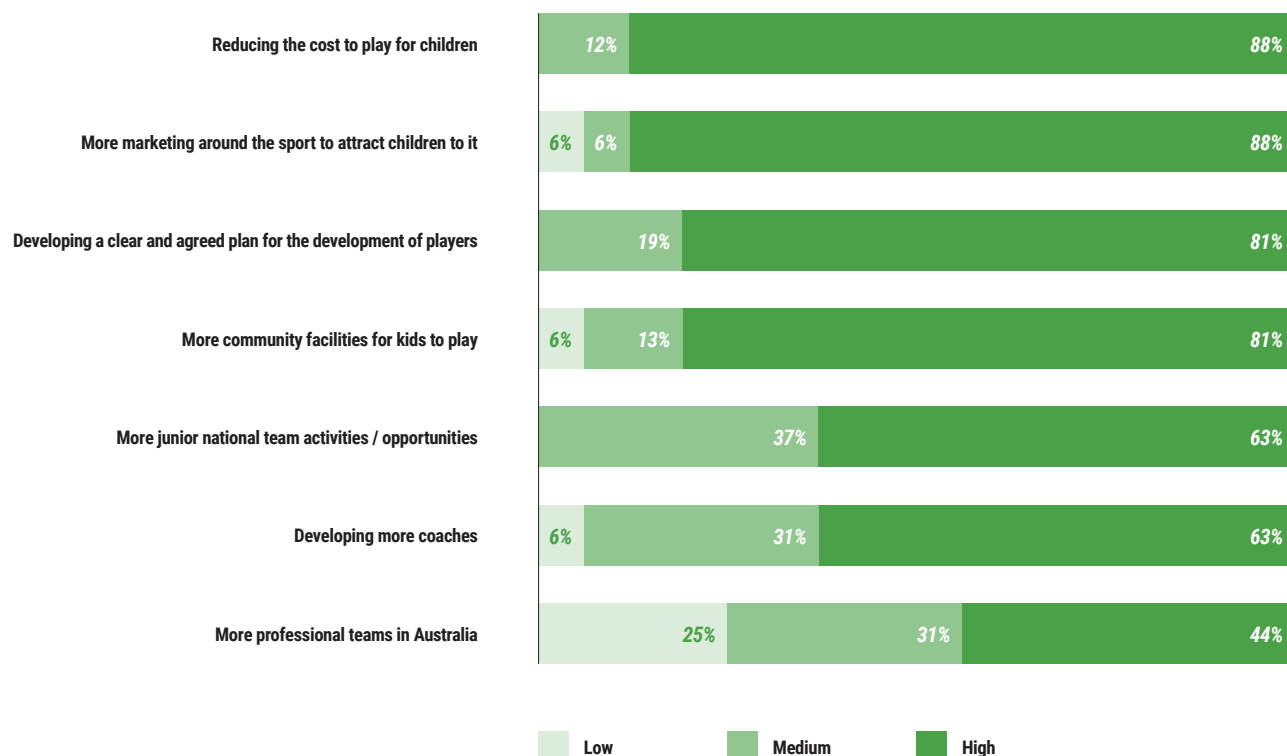
In another question, 59% of the Socceroos said their dad was the person who first got them into the game, and a further 41% said it was their mum, calling to mind *Football Starts at Home*, the name of American development coach Tom Byer's program for early childhood ball mastery.

Whilst our professional leagues and elite youth programs obviously have

a role to play in players' development, an exclusive focus on policy and regulations which impact late-teenaged and older players risks trying to engineer outcomes when it's too late. There is an evidence-based case for an equal focus on childhood and grassroots interventions which ensure more players arrive at that age with world class potential.



**To produce the next generation of Socceroos or Matildas, what are the areas Australian football should be prioritising?**



<sup>16</sup> <https://pfa.net.au/wp-content/uploads/PFA-Golden-Generation-Report-DIGITAL.pdf>

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



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