



FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION  
AUSTRALIA

# THE PERFORMANCE GAP







# INTRODUCTION

Since 2012, Australia’s junior men’s national football teams have secured just four top four finishes from thirteen attempts at AFC U-17, U-20, and U-23 Championships.

Throughout this period, Australia failed to qualify for two FIFA U-17 World Cups, three consecutive FIFA U-20 World Cups, and two consecutive Olympic Games (London 2012 and Rio 2016).

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has presented Football Federation Australia (FFA) a chance to reflect on the current development opportunities available to our elite youth footballers. Having recently qualified the Olyroos (U-23) to our first Olympics in 12 years, Graham Arnold and his staff have identified a significant lack of match experience across our player pool in comparison to leading football nations.

This ‘Performance Gap’ study set out to identify and obtain an in-depth understanding of the current deficiencies within the performance phase for our elite U-17 to U-23 men’s footballers. Although we acknowledge there is a vast range of factors that contribute to the holistic development of a professional footballer, regular match minutes during this age bracket are a critical element in fulfilling a player’s potential. Match experience during these crucial years are often the difference between a long-term playing career, or a talent exiting the game prematurely.

The purpose of this study is to commence a collective discussion and develop solutions that ensure our talented youth players are afforded opportunities to progress their careers. We believe such opportunities will drive future generations of successful national teams and help to underpin the broader Australian football ecosystem.

- The study aims to provide evidence based on the following principles:
- Assess opportunities for our elite players from U-17 to U-23 to regularly obtain valuable match minutes, resembling their counterparts in Europe/Asia;
  - Identify competition structures that supports producing players and enhances the likelihood to transitioning into professional football;

AFC Junior Men’s Championships			
Birth Year	JOEYS	YOUNG SOCCEROOS	OLYROOS
89 & 90		2008	2012
91 & 92	2008	2010	2014
93 & 94	2010	2012	2016
95 & 96	2012	2014	2018
97 & 98	2014	2016	2020
99 & 00	2016	2018	2022
01 & 02	2018	2020	2024
<div><div></div>Top Four Finish (Qualifying for World Cup)</div> <div><div></div>Did Not Qualify (Youth Program Shutdown)</div>			

- National Football Identity is placed as a priority so that player pathways produce generations of successful national teams;
- Develop a robust domestic training compensation and solidarity payments structure that encourages domestic and international transfers, while ensuring that earnings are reinvested into the domestic game at all levels.

I’d like to thank Graham Arnold, Doug Kors and James Duvcevski (FFA Technical and National Teams Department) for their significant contributions to this study. I extend this thanks to the Technical, Leagues and Legal Departments at FFA for their additions in providing key information. I look forward to evaluating the opportunities for change.

James Johnson  
Football Federation Australia CEO

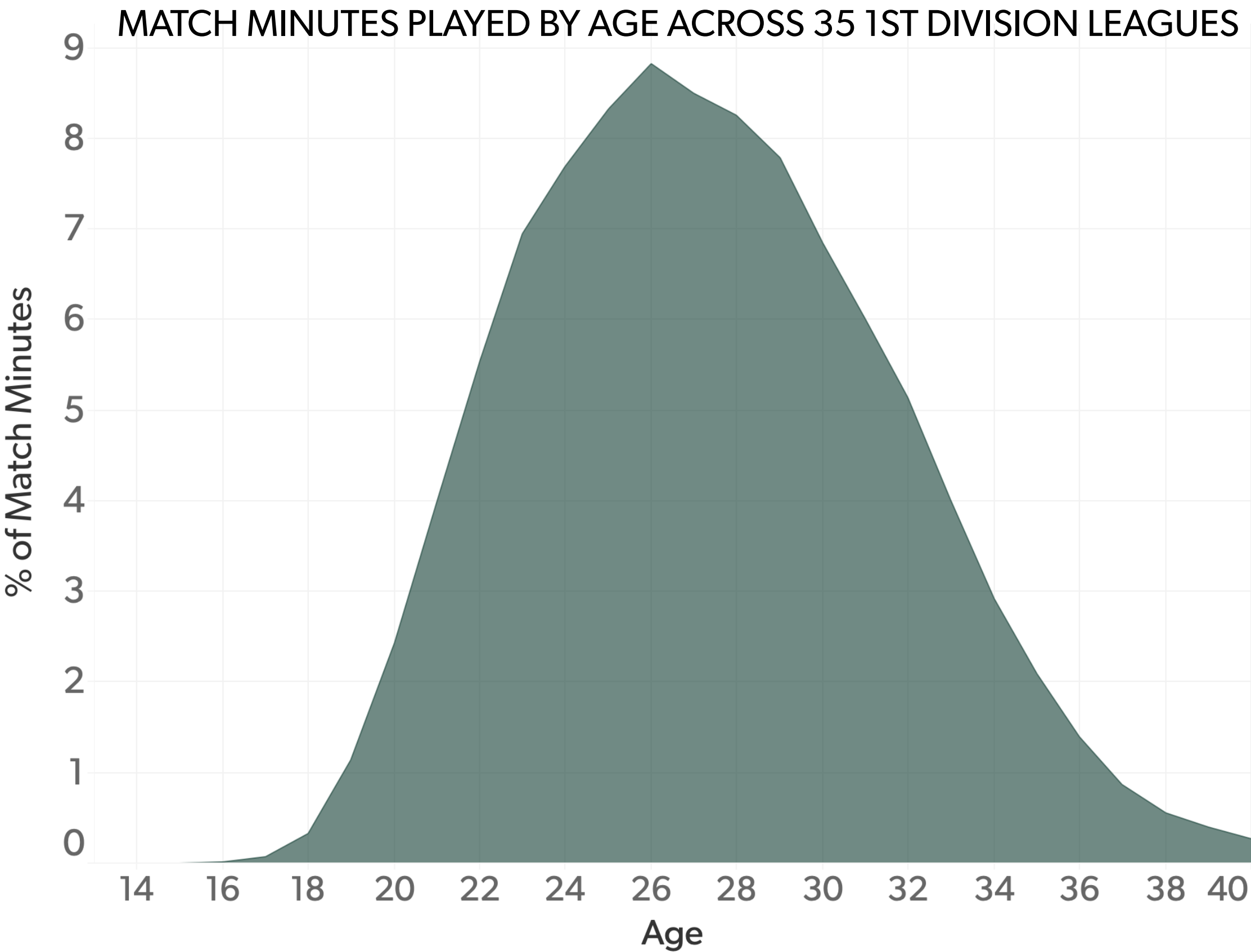


# AGE DISTRIBUTION OF PROFESSIONAL MALE FOOTBALLERS

Individual player profile and performance data was collected across 35 professional 1st division men's leagues from four different confederations across five seasons (2014-15 to 2018-19).

The sample includes 777 teams with 35,972 male players, with a combined 110,451,360 match minutes.

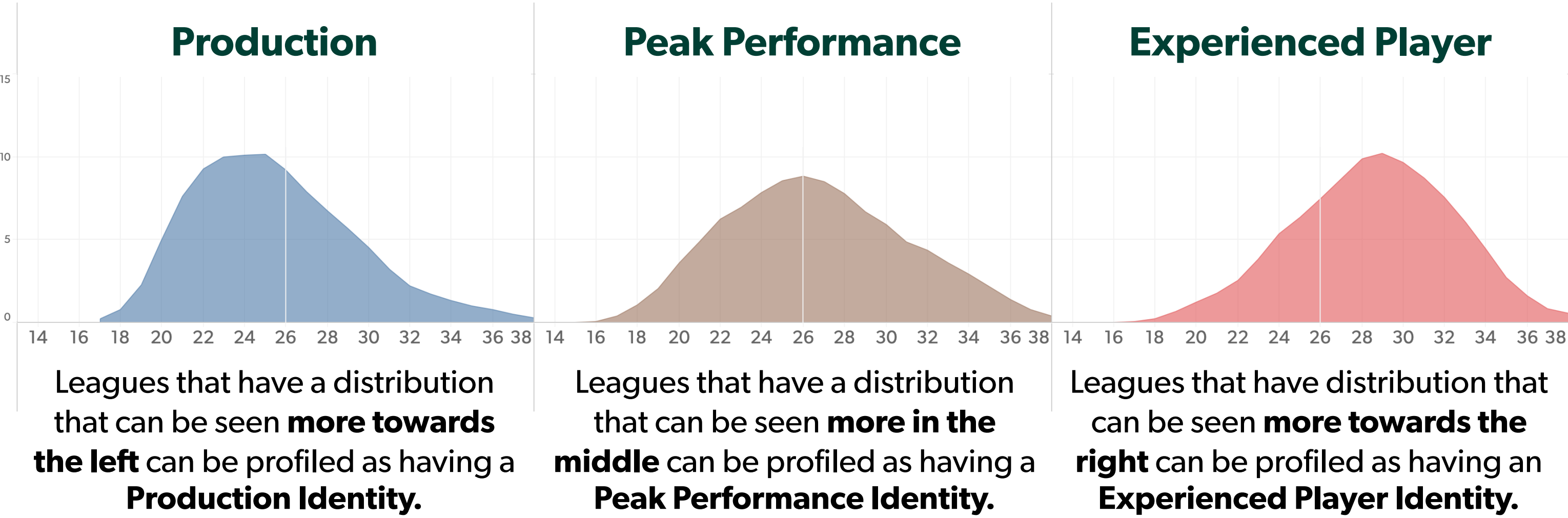
The distribution across these ages identifies that the peak ages for playing professional football for a male player occurs between the ages of 24 and 29.



## Data Collected from 35 1st Division Leagues over 5 Seasons



## Profiling National Football Identities using Age Distribution of Match Minutes



**4 The Performance Gap** Playing more than 2250 minutes (90 minutes x 25 matches) in a season, under the age of 23, was seen as a significant indicator for positive career progression.



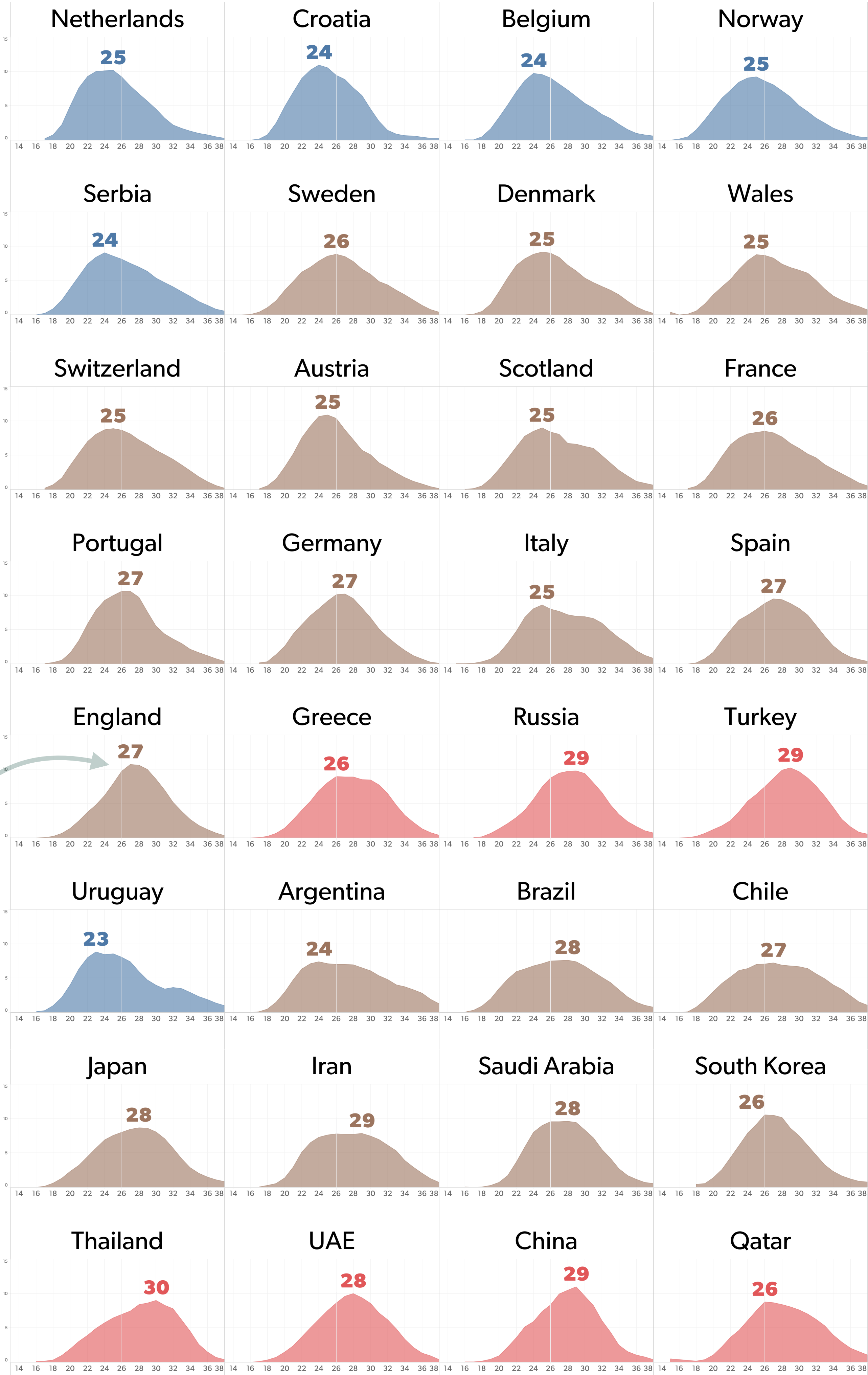
# 2014/15 TO 18/19 AGE DISTRIBUTION IN 1ST DIVISION LEAGUES

League Identity

- Production
- Peak Performance
- Experienced Player



Age which plays highest number of match minutes



1st Division leagues in Netherlands, Croatia, Belgium, Norway, Serbia & Uruguay can be categorised as leagues with a Production Identity.

**The Performance Gap**

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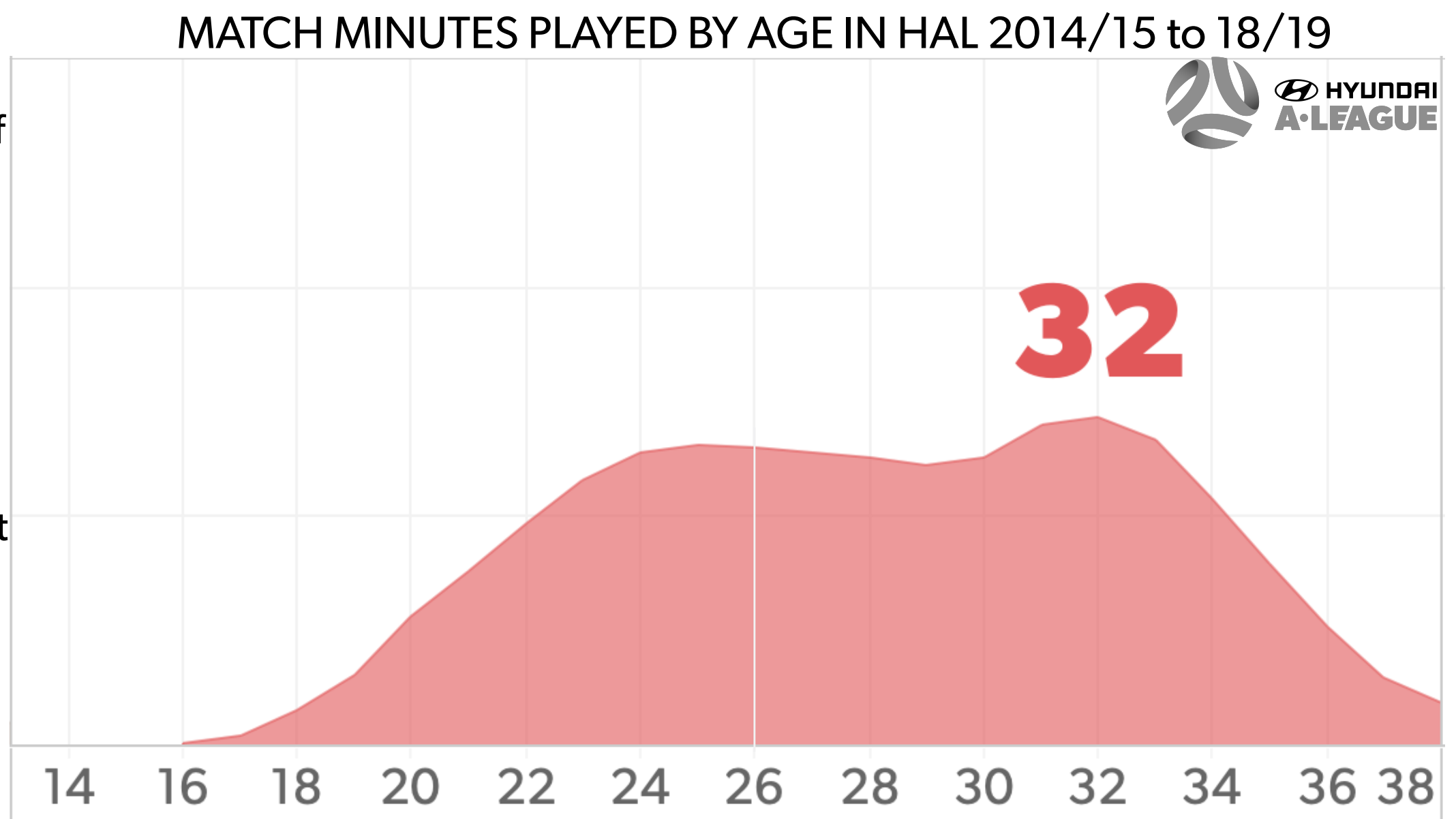
# THE FOOTBALL IDENTITY OF THE HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE

The Hyundai A-League (HAL) can be profiled as a league with an identity of playing experienced players.

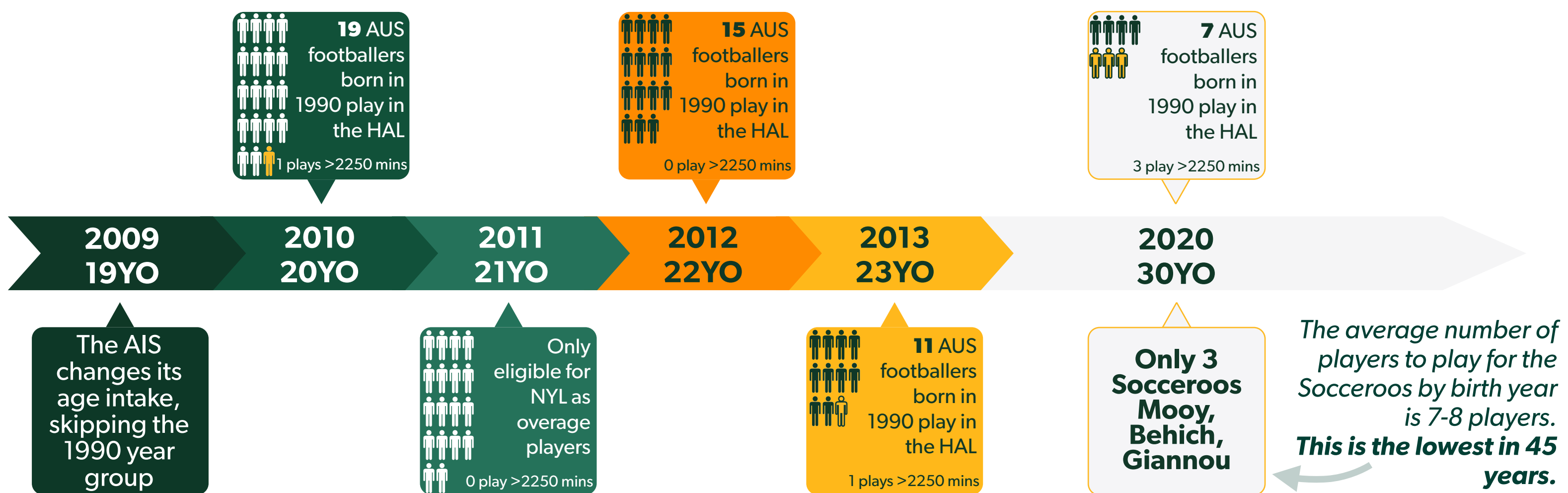
Players who turned 32 years old during the season played the most number of match minutes over the past five seasons. This was the highest observed across all 35 leagues.

The age distribution in the HAL does not peak as expected in the

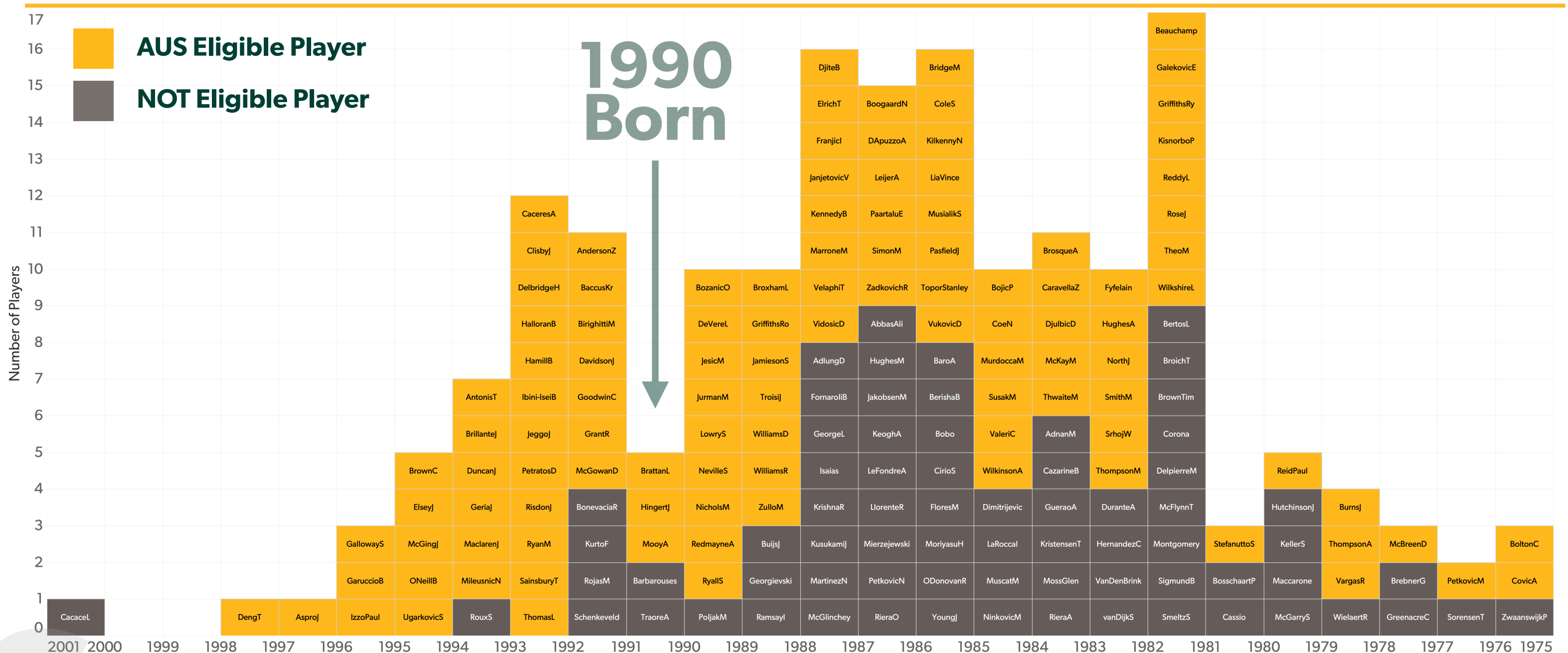
24-29 range, this bimodal distribution is likely caused by the lack of Australian footballers born in 1990 playing professional football in the last five years.



## The 1990s - Development Timeline



## 2010-19 Hyundai A-League Players with > 2250 Minutes in a Season



PLAYERS WITH MORE THAN >2250 MINUTES IN A SEASON IN THE HAL FROM 2010-2019

## The Performance Gap

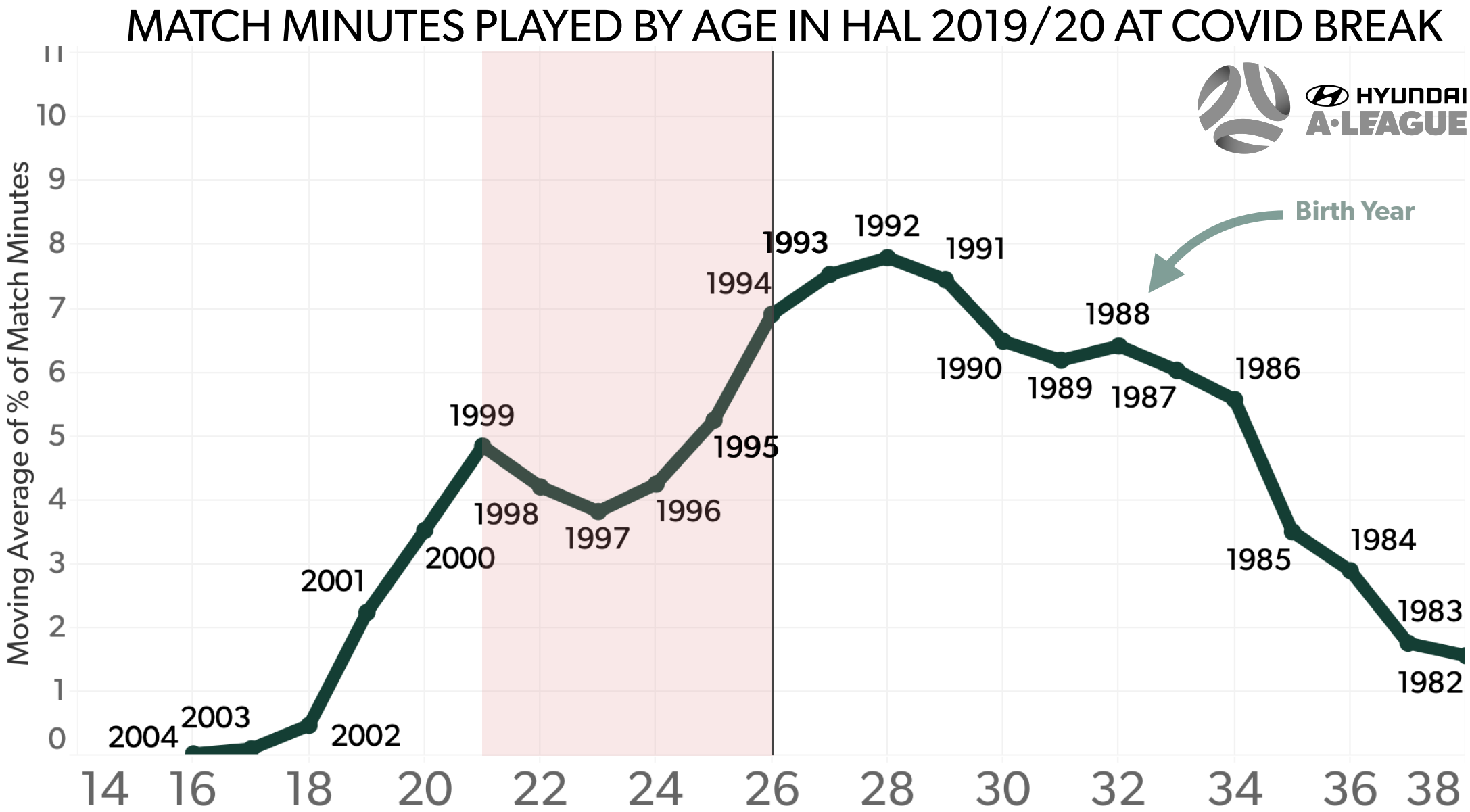


# HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE 2019/20 SEASON AT COVID BREAK

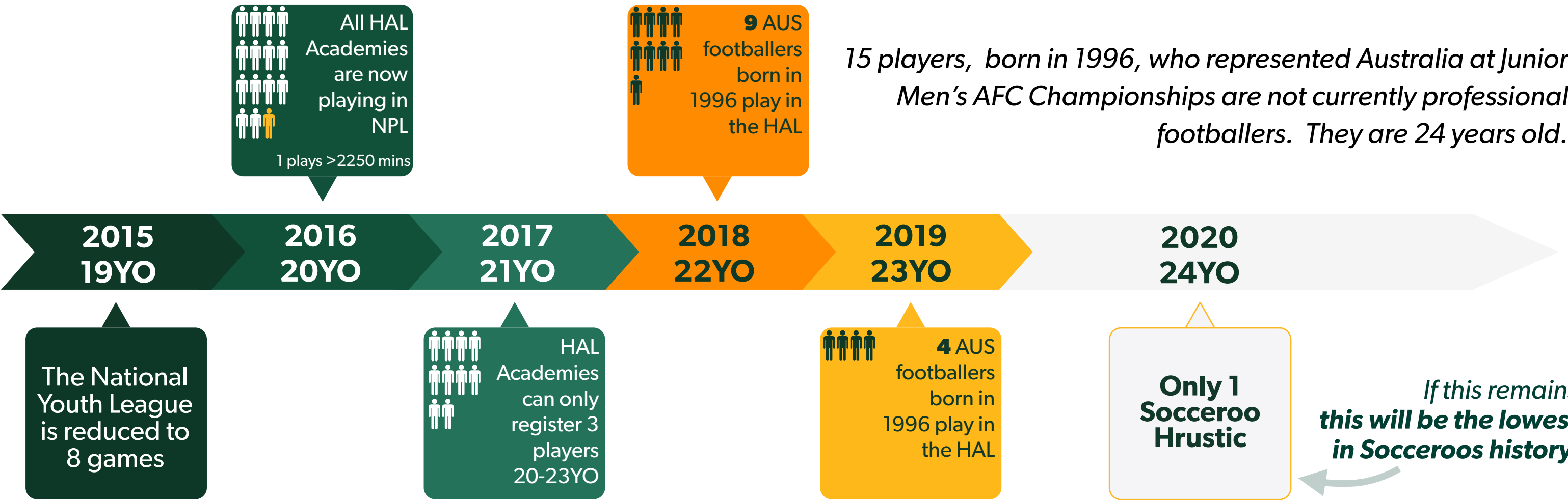
The current 2019/20 season, paused due to COVID19, highlights the Performance Gap that exists in Australian football with limited match minutes being played by players born between 1995-1997.

This data is similar to what we have observed with the 1990 age group, but is now spread across three consecutive years.

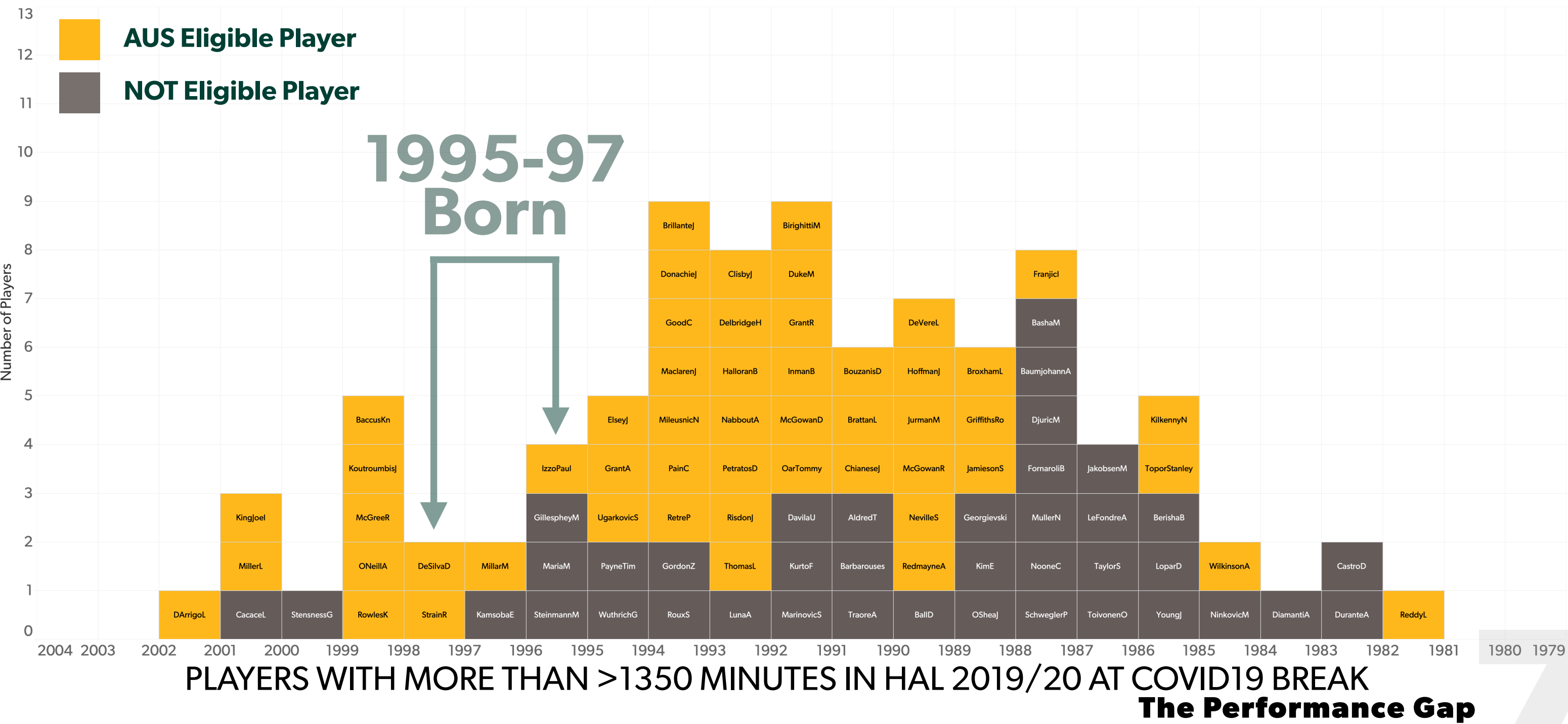
Based on the data available, without any changes, we would anticipate that it will be likely the bimodal distribution viewed over the past five seasons will continue, with a larger decrease in the peak performance ages as these 95-97s move into the Peak 24-29 year old category.



## The 1996s - Development Timeline



## Hyundai A-League 2019/20 Players with > 1350 Minutes in a Season



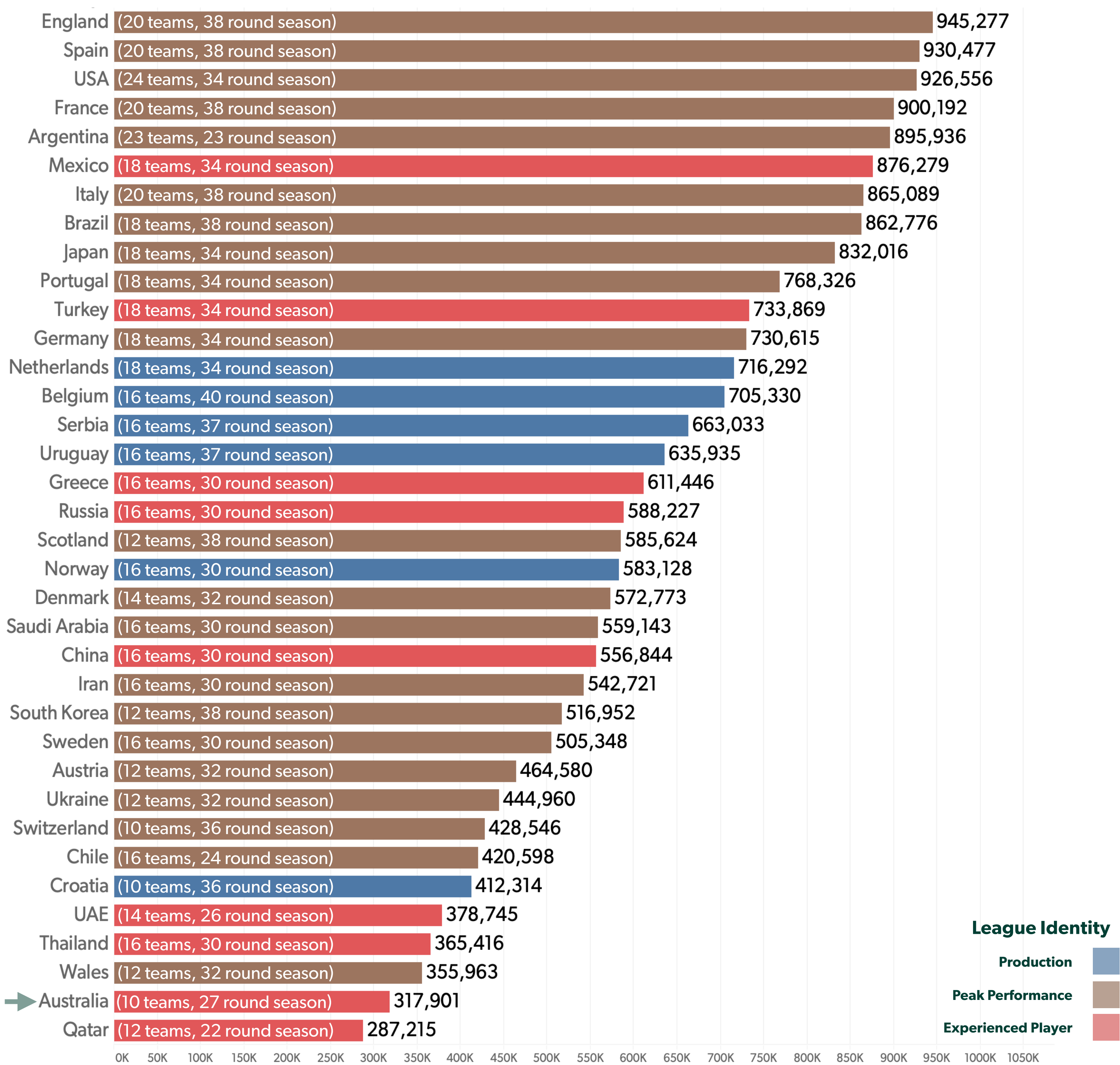




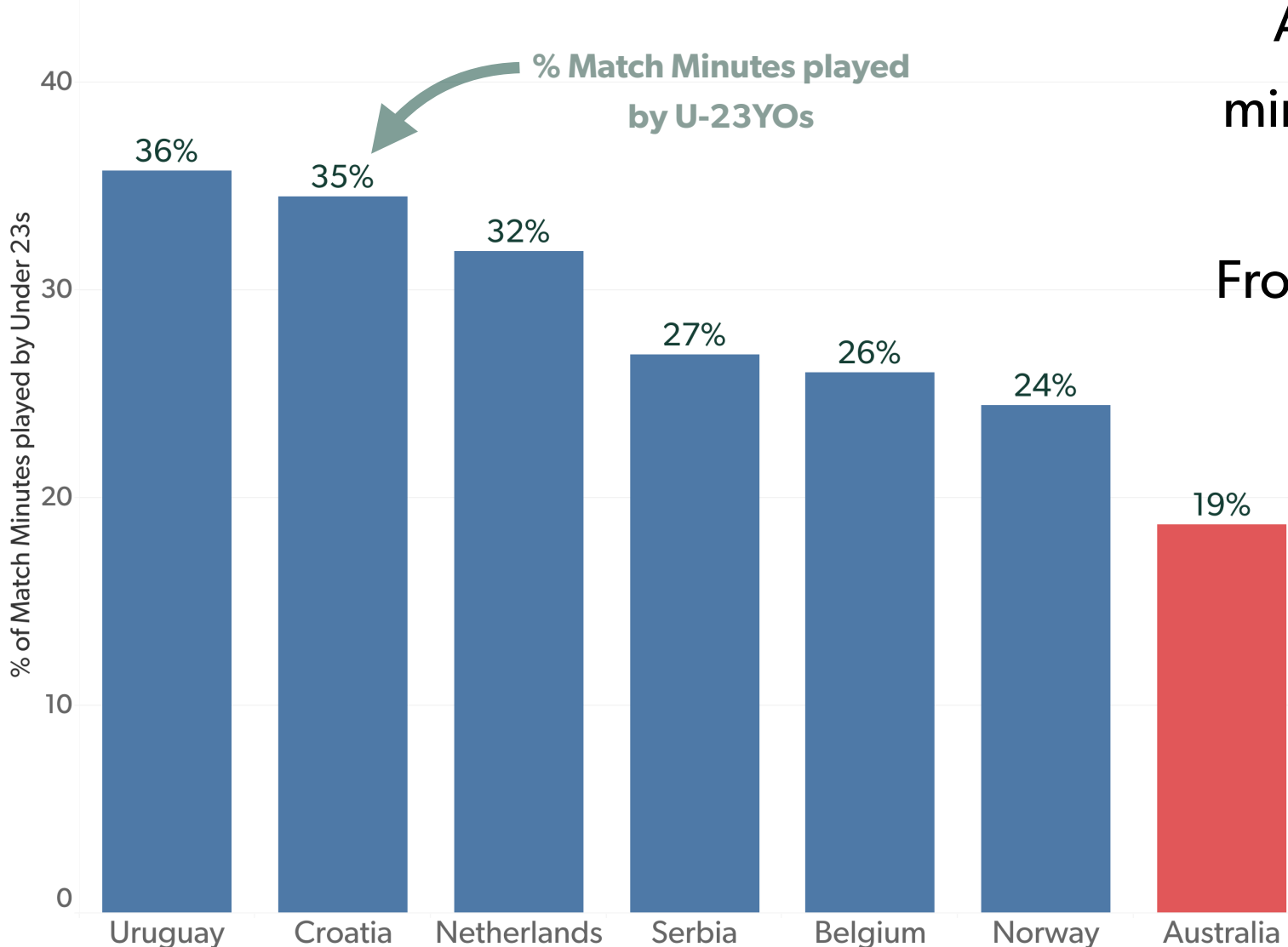


# HOW MUCH PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL IS PLAYED IN AUS?

TOTAL MATCH MINUTES PLAYED BY PLAYERS IN 1ST DIVISION TEAMS IN 2018/19



% OF MATCH MINUTES PLAYED BY U-23s in 2018/19



Australia has the second lowest professional 1st division match minutes available compared to the other 35 leagues researched.

From these match minutes, only 19% are played by players under the age of 23. The equivalent of 2 players from a starting 11.

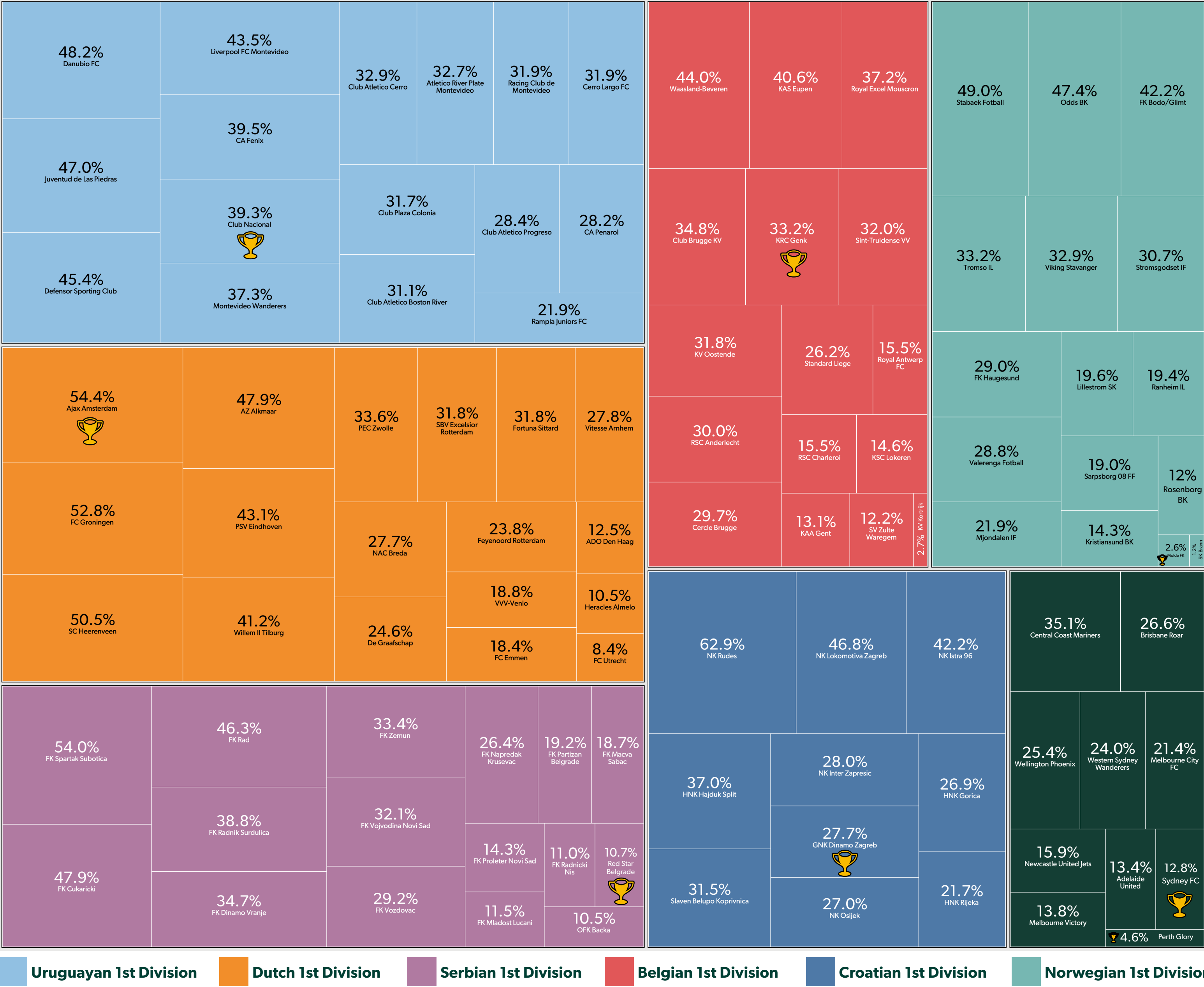
Leagues that we can categorise as having a Production Identity will have 24-36% of match minutes played by U-23s.

The equivalent of 3 to 4 players out of a starting 11.



# “YOU CAN’T WIN ANYTHING WITH KIDS” - A FOOTBALL MYTH

% OF MATCH MINUTES PLAYED BY U-23 PLAYERS IN 1ST DIVISION TEAMS IN 2018/19

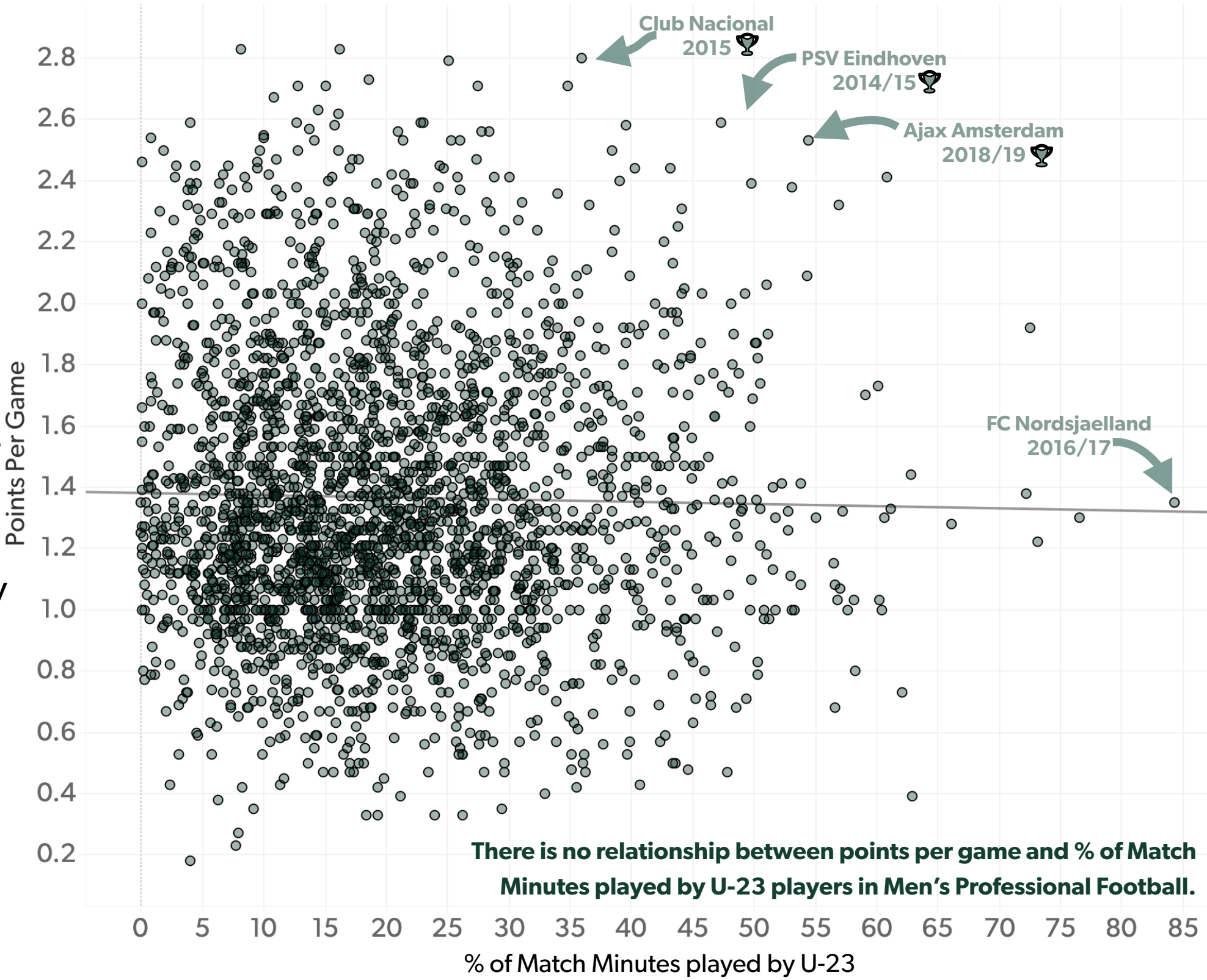


One of the most common misconceptions in football is that playing youth players will hurt a teams ability to win games. However, the data shows that there is no relationship between Points Per Game and % Match Minutes played by U-23s.

It is common for leagues with a Production Identity to have many teams with U-23 year olds achieving more than 30% of match minutes.

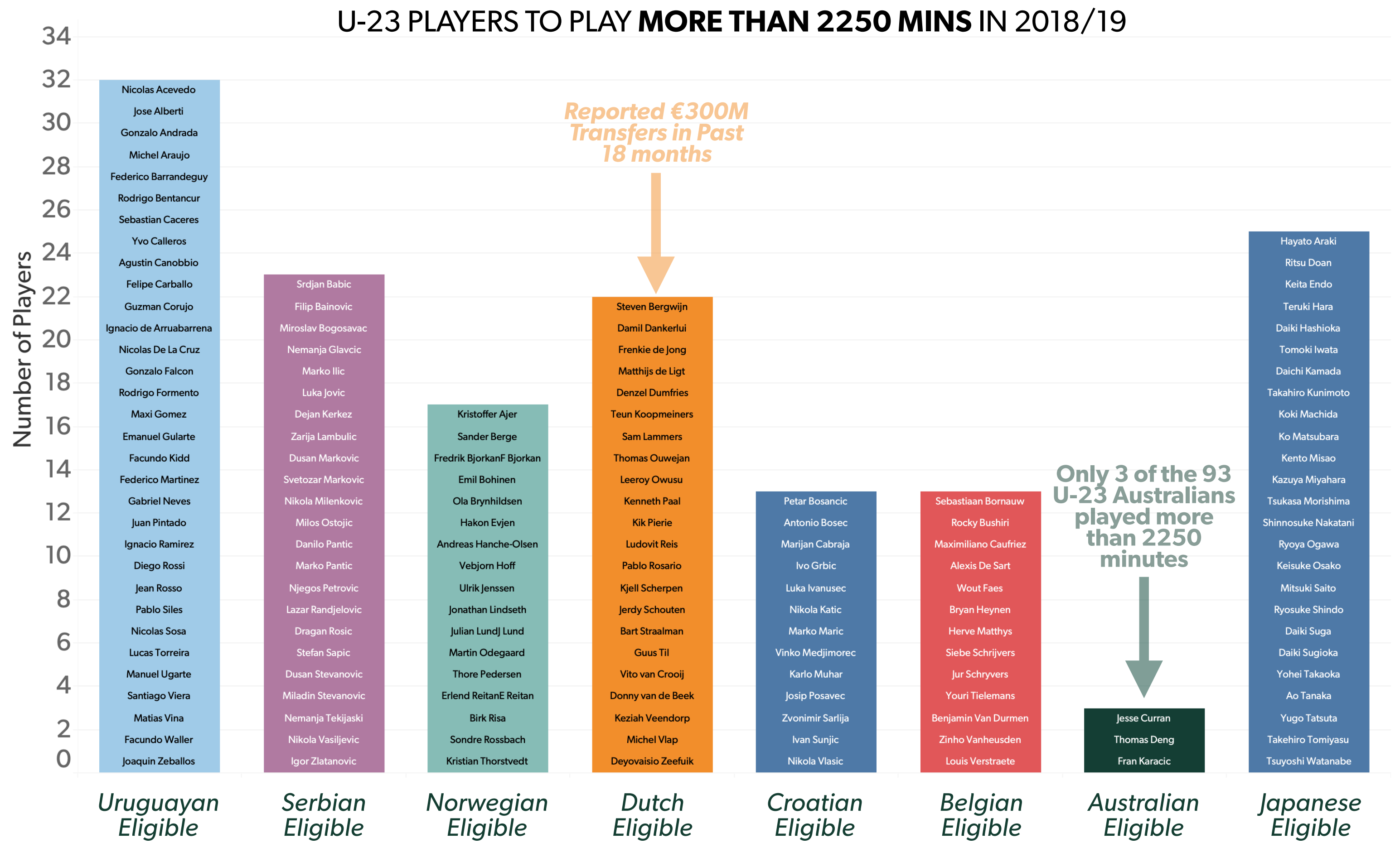
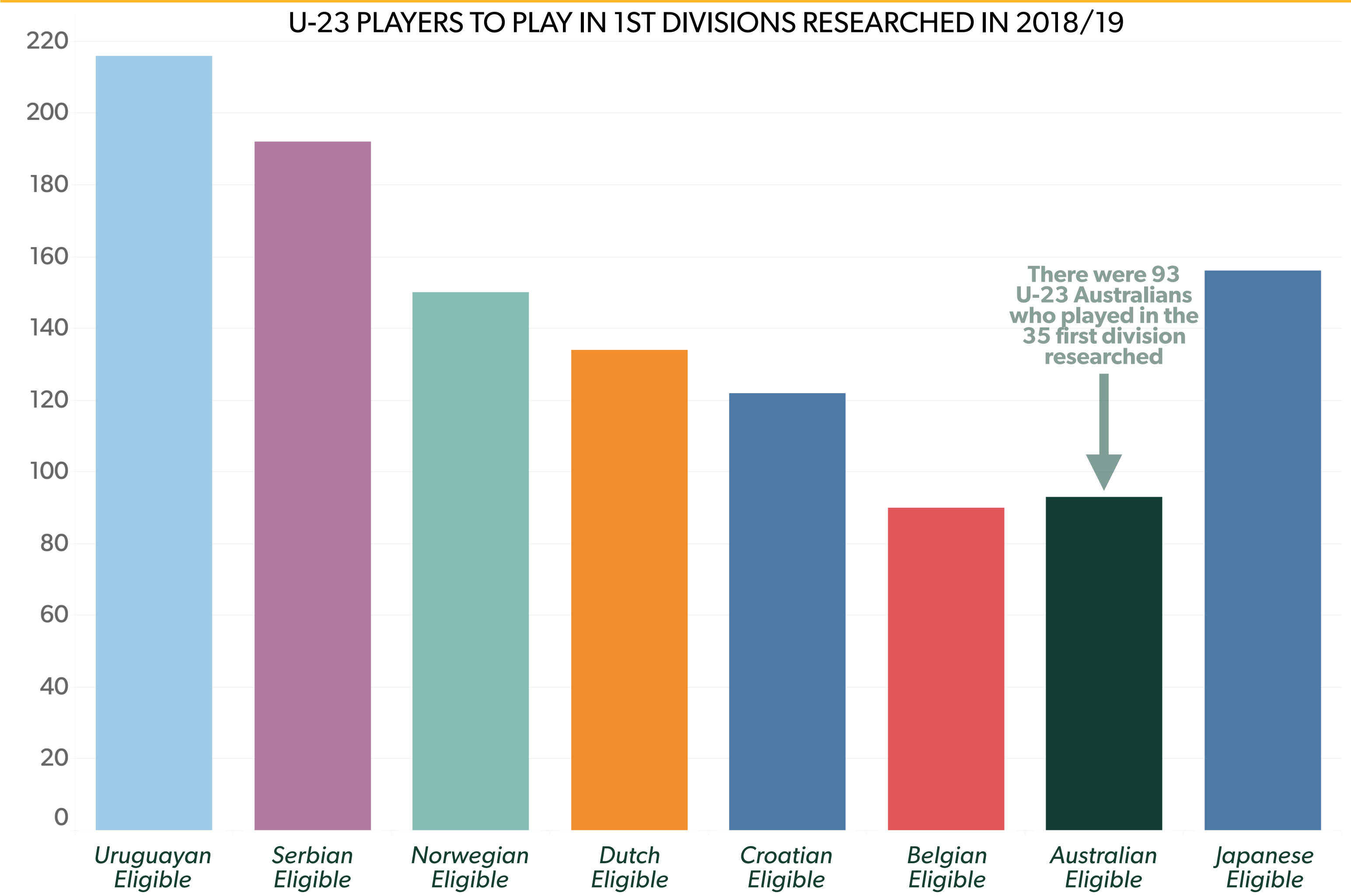
In the past five seasons of the HAL there has only been a total of five teams to achieve this.

Leagues with a Production Identity average more than seven teams per season.





# U-23 PLAYERS ELIGIBLE FOR NATIONAL TEAMS TO PLAY IN 2018/19



Nations that have Leagues with a Production Identity will average 15% of their U-23 Players playing more than 2250 minutes in a season. This creates a player pool in the range of 15-30 U-23 players for National Team selection. Australia has 3.

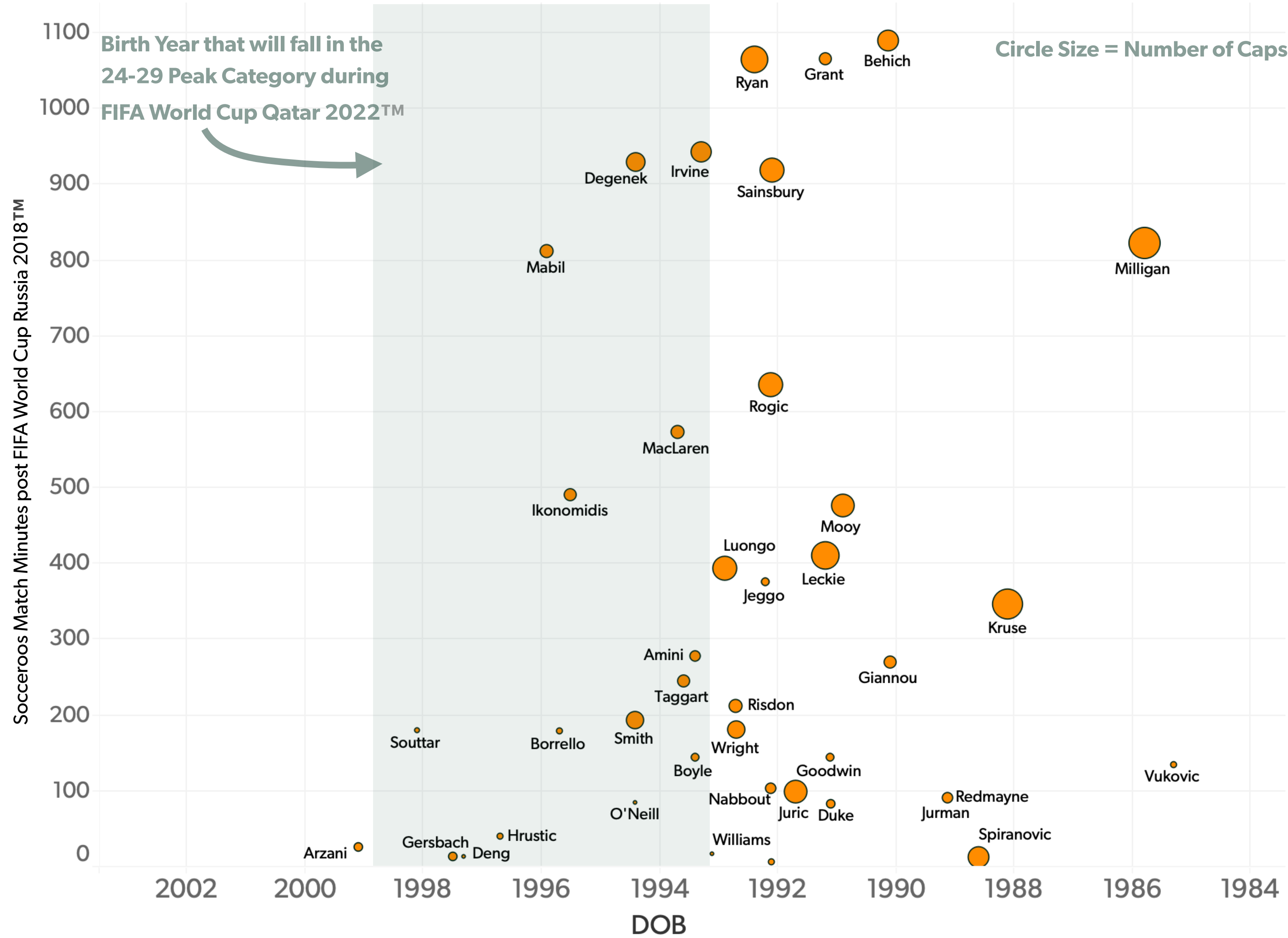
**The Performance Gap**





# IMPACT ON AUSTRALIAN MEN'S NATIONAL TEAMS

MATCH MINUTES PLAYED FOR THE SOCCEROOS SINCE FIFA WORLD CUP RUSSIA 2018™



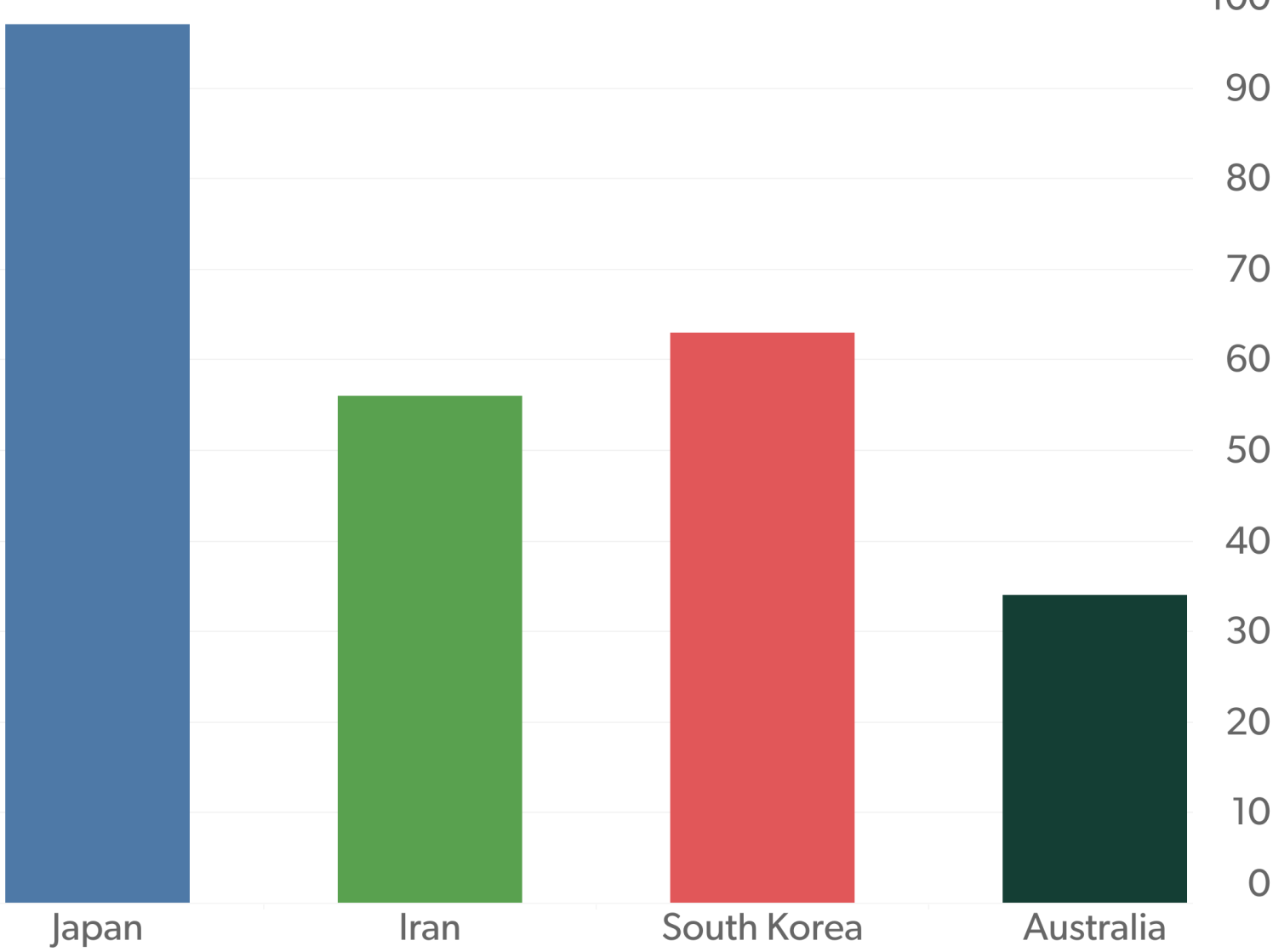
These findings will have an impact on the age profile of the Socceroos over the next two FIFA World Cup cycles.

There will be a limited number of 24-29 year old players in the player pool available for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. This will likely result in Australia having one of its oldest squads at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™.

However, the Performance Gap is already having an impact on the current national team player pool. During the 2018/19 season there were only 34 Australians under the age of 30 who played > 2250 minutes.

Japan had 97 players and in November 2019 returned to being the #1 Ranked men's team in Asia for the first time since 2014.

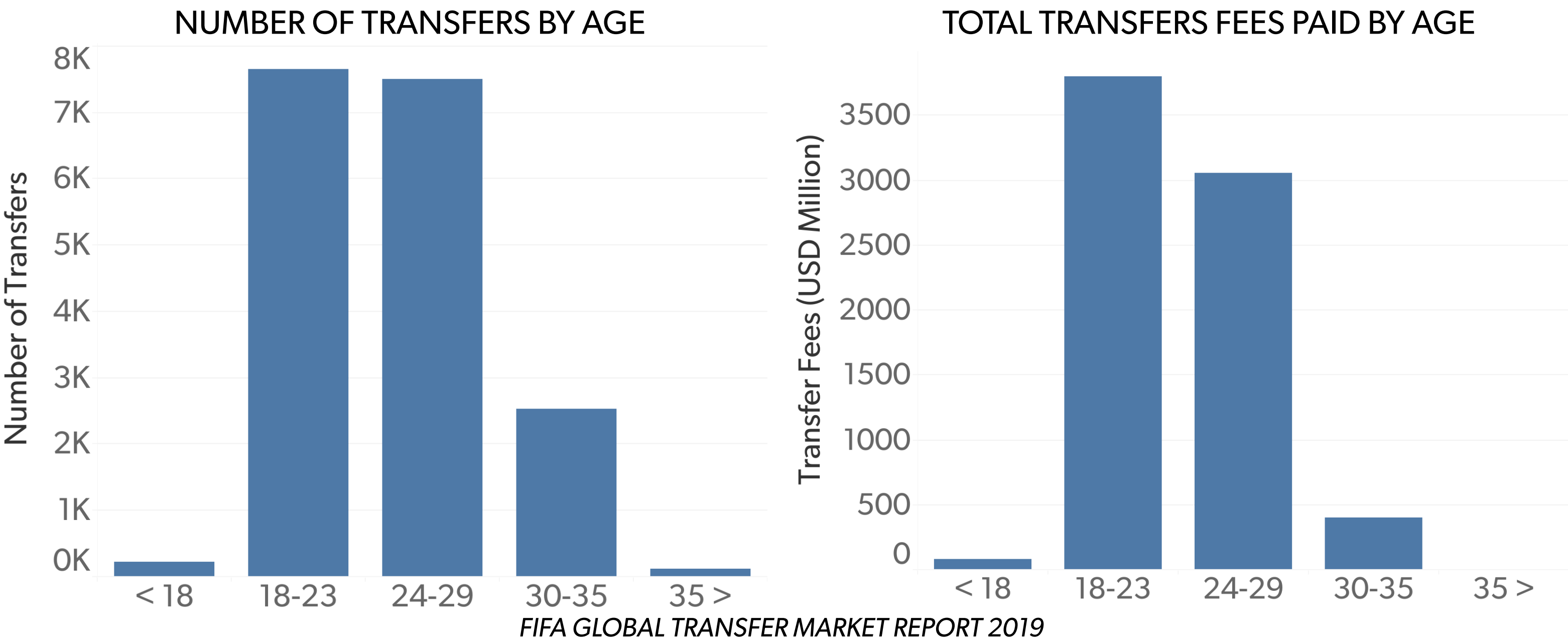
NUMBER OF U-30 TO PLAY >2250 MINS IN 18/19



This data has been expanded to include 2nd divisions from England, Spain & Germany



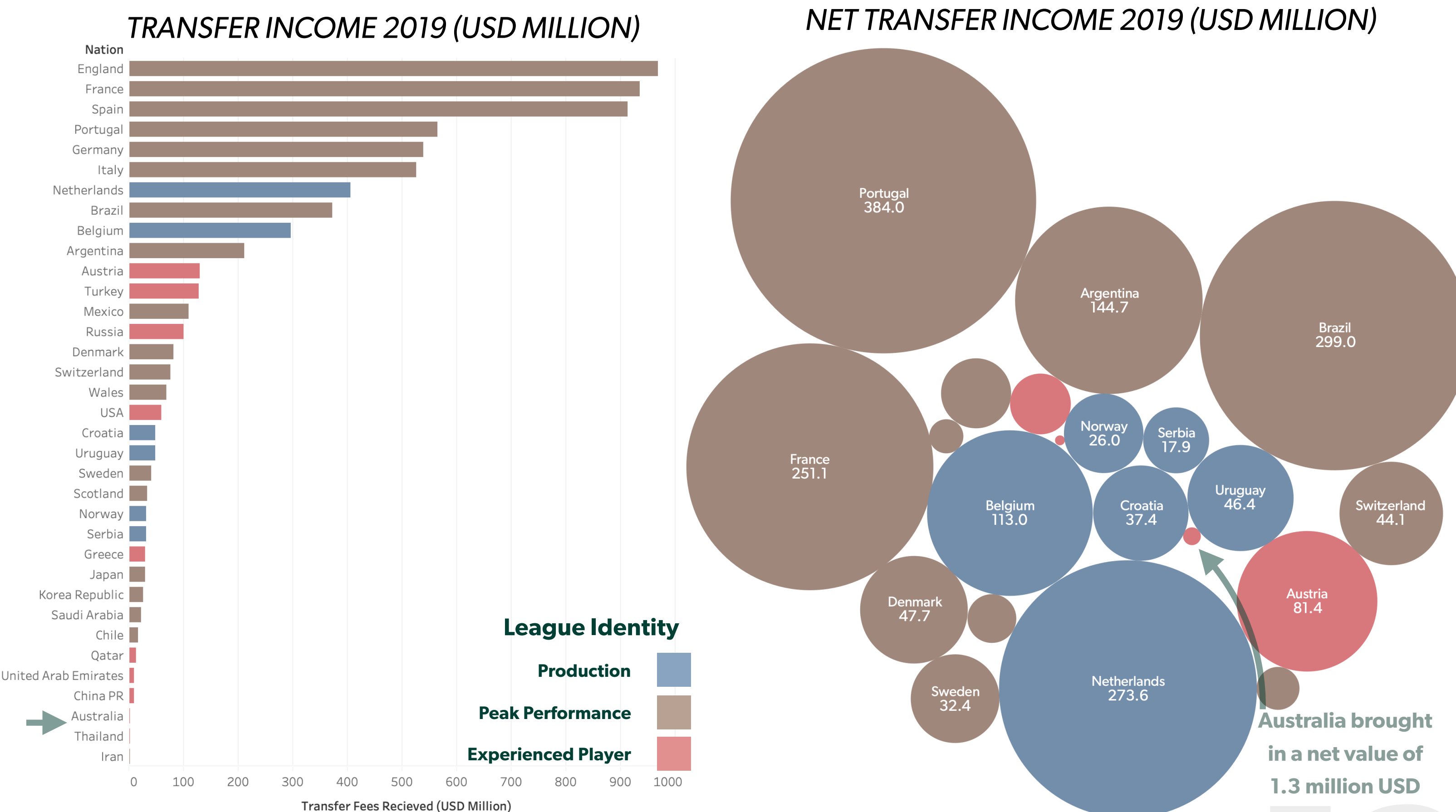
# IMPACT ON HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE AND MEMBER FEDERATIONS



FIFA’s 2019 Global Transfer Market Report illustrates the impact on international transfers for professional leagues with an Experienced Player Identity. This identity limits the amount of international transfers and transfer fees into Australian football.

**Only 15% of transfers in football occur in the 30+ Experienced Player bracket, which contributes only 6% of transfer fees in the global transfer market.**

Historically there has been over \$50M AUD in transfer fees paid to HAL clubs, however this is significantly less compared to the leagues with a Production Identity who brought in an average \$65.35M USD each last season, compared to Australia’s \$1.9M USD.



More than half (55%) of Australians who play more than 2250 minutes in a Hyundai A-League season, before they turn 23, are sold overseas for a transfer fee.

**The Performance Gap**

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# TRAINING COMPENSATION & SOLIDARITY MECHANISM

## Domestic Training Compensation

Training Compensation is a financial reimbursement paid to a player's training clubs when a player signs their first professional contract and/or on each subsequent transfer until their 23rd birthday.

A player's training clubs are considered to be every club that has contributed to their training, starting from the season of their 12th birthday through to the season of their 21st birthday.

## International Training Compensation

International Training Compensation works in a similar manner to Domestic Training Compensation, however the amount of compensation payable to and from International Clubs is governed by FIFA Statutes and depends on the specified category of the new Club.

## Solidarity Mechanism

If a professional moves during the course of a contract, 5% of any compensation, not including training compensation paid to his former club, shall be deducted from the total amount of this compensation and distributed by the new club as a solidarity contribution to the club(s) involved in his training and education over the years.

### Domestic Training Compensation (U-23 Players)



Domestic Training Compensation is paid to FFA and then distributed by FFA.

### International Training Compensation (U-23 Players)



\* Compensation value depends on FIFA categorisation.

### Transfer Fees & Solidarity Mechanism



International Training Compensation and Solidarity is distributed by the players new club and overseen by FIFA.

### Domestic Training Compensation (U-23 Players)



### International Training Compensation (U-23 Players)



### Transfer Fees & Solidarity Mechanism



It is estimated that NPL clubs are owed hundreds of thousands in unclaimed Training Compensation and Solidarity Contribution. However, there is a two year statute of limitations on applications to FIFA's Dispute Resolution Chamber.



CASE STUDY - RYAN TEAGUE

Domestic Training Compensation (U-23 Players)

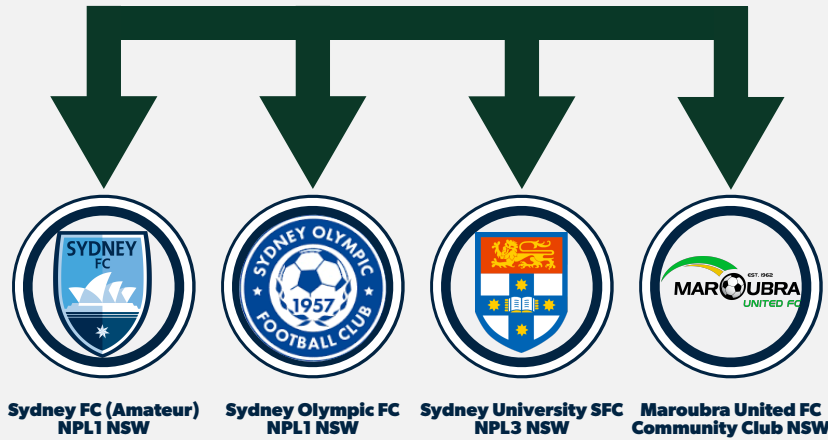


First Professional Contract



\$10,000 AUD

Pro-Rated to clubs registered to between 12th - 21st birthday.



18-year-old midfielder Ryan Teague captained Australia’s Joeys at the FIFA U-17 World Cup in 2019.

Between 2017 and 2019, Teague played over 20 international youth fixtures, comprising games at AFF, AFC, and FIFA tournaments, as well as supplementary friendly matches (tours to Turkey & England).

Sydney FC secured a transfer fee for Teague – to FC Famalicao of Portugal – following his showings in Brazil, which he had prepared for with back to back seasons of more than 2250 minutes in NPL1 and NYL. Teague made one appearance for the Sky Blues in the Hyundai A-League prior to his departure, aged 17.

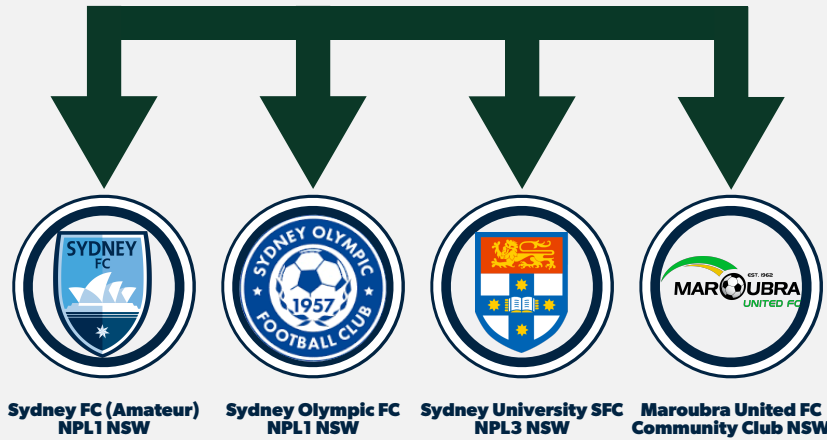
Transfer Fees & Solidarity Mechanism



Transferred Between Clubs



5% OF TRANSFER FEE  
Pro-Rated to clubs registered to between 12th - 23rd birthday as solidarity contribution.



CASE STUDY - THOMAS DENG

Domestic Training Compensation (U-23 Players)



First Professional Contract



\$10,000 AUD

Pro-Rated to clubs registered to between 12th - 21st birthday.



23-year-old defender Thomas Deng secured a transfer from Melbourne Victory to Urawa Red Diamonds in Japan’s top-flight after captaining Australia to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the AFC U-23 Championship Thailand 2020.

Deng has been exposed to significant and consistent match minutes at strong levels of the game throughout his career thus far. In back-to-back HAL campaigns (17/18 & 18/19) Deng played more than 2250 minutes.

In total, Deng played 6,554 minutes for Victory, over 20 caps for Australia at U-20, U-23, and senior level (one Socceroos cap).

Transfer Fees & Solidarity Mechanism



Transferred Between Clubs



5% OF TRANSFER FEE  
Pro-Rated to clubs registered to between 12th - 23rd birthday as solidarity contribution.





# CHALLENGES - JUNIOR NATIONAL TEAM PROGRAMS

## Limited Program

Between 2012-2018 Australian Junior National Men's Team programs have commonly only operated for half of the year, between July to November.

It is more common for National Teams in Asia to play in January, March and June with many teams taking international tours.

## Lack of International Matches

Between 2012-2018 Australian Junior National Men's Team are often limited to local or Asian based camps and tours.

This limits the amount of international matches against high level opponents.

### AUSTRALIA

### U-20 National Teams Schedule 2018

### JAPAN

	JANUARY	3 Matches <i>Spain Tour</i>
	MARCH	3 Matches <i>Indonesia Tour</i>
	JUNE	3 Matches <i>Portugal Tour</i>
3 Matches <i>Japan Tour</i>	AUGUST	3 Matches <i>Local Tournament</i>
3 Matches <i>Local Camp</i>	SEPTEMBER	4 Matches <i>Brazil Tour</i>
2 Matches <i>Pre Camp</i>	OCTOBER	2 Matches <i>Pre Camp</i>
<b>8 Matches</b> 3 vs National Teams 5 vs Club Teams	<b>TOTAL GAMES PRIOR TO AFC CHAMP</b>	<b>18 Matches</b> 11 vs National Teams 7 vs Club Teams

# CHALLENGES - HOW DO WE CATEGORISE A YOUTH PLAYER



2019/20 Championships  
(1997s -) Olyroos  
(2001s -) Young Socceroos  
(2004s -) Joeys



2019/20 Season  
(1996s -) Extended Substitutes  
(1998s -) Minimum 3x U-21 Players  
(1999s -) FYL Player



2020 Season  
(2000 - 2004) NPL Player  
(1997- 1999) Overage Player

2019/20 Age Category's Across National Teams & Leagues  
Players born in identified year and younger years were eligible



# CHALLENGES - 2-STAR ACADEMIES IN NPL

## U20 Age Limit

Hyundai A-League Academies are limited to U-20 players with only 3-4 players between 21-23 years old eligible to be registered as “overage players”, depending on the member federations competition regulations.

## Annual Leave

Professional contracted players are required to be given an opportunity to take five weeks annual leave requirements under government legislation. This is generally taken after the HAL season, meaning these players miss parts of the NPL season.

## Level of Competition

Only four out of the nine Two Star Academies are currently in NPL1  
WSW & CCM are in NPL2 NSW  
MCY & MVC are in NPL3 VIC  
NEW are in NPL4 NSW

## No One or Three Stars

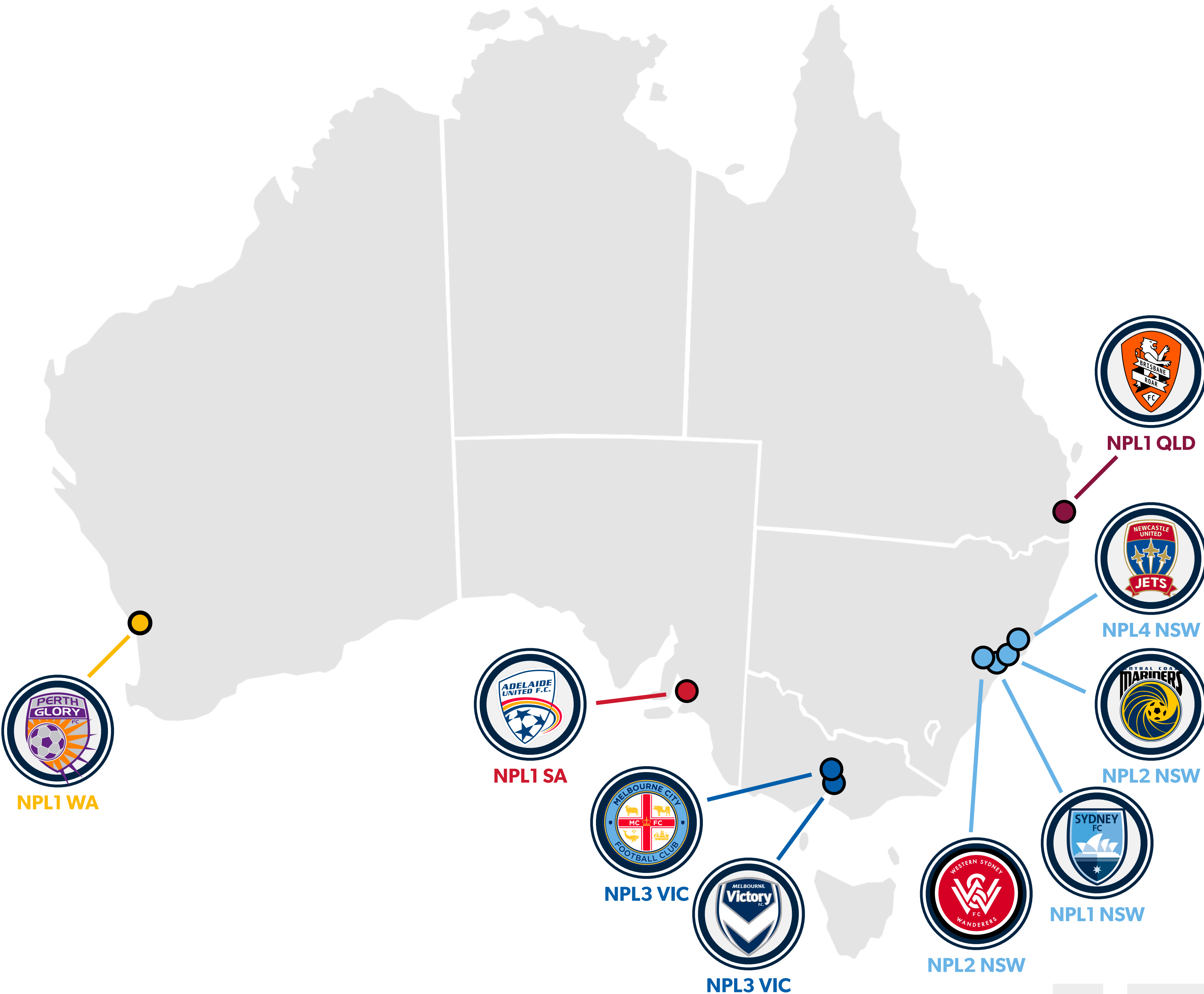
There are currently no other 1, 2 or 3- Star Academies.  
The last accreditation was awarded in March 2018.

## Upcoming Expiry

The current 2-Star Academy status expires in December 2020.  
The FFA Technical Director would perform these evaluations.

## Schedule Clash with HAL

In some cases a teams HAL side will play on the same day as a clubs NPL side, meaning that players who don’t get match minutes in the HAL are unable to play in the NPL.



There are currently 1028 players registered to 2-Star Academies for the 2020 NPL Season.



CHALLENGES - NATIONAL YOUTH LEAGUE

8 Game Season

In 2015-16 the National Youth League (NYL) was reduced from an 18 game season to a 8 game season plus grand final.

This proves a maximum of only 810 minutes available to play in.

Schedule Clash with HAL

More than half of NYL matches clash with HAL schedules, meaning it is not possible for a player who sits on the bench and does not play, or has low minutes in the game, to gain meaningful competitive match minutes.

This has a significant impact on Junior National Team Players. These players in the 17-23 age group are often included in HAL match day squads, but with no competitions to play in they lack match fitness and readiness.

Conference Based

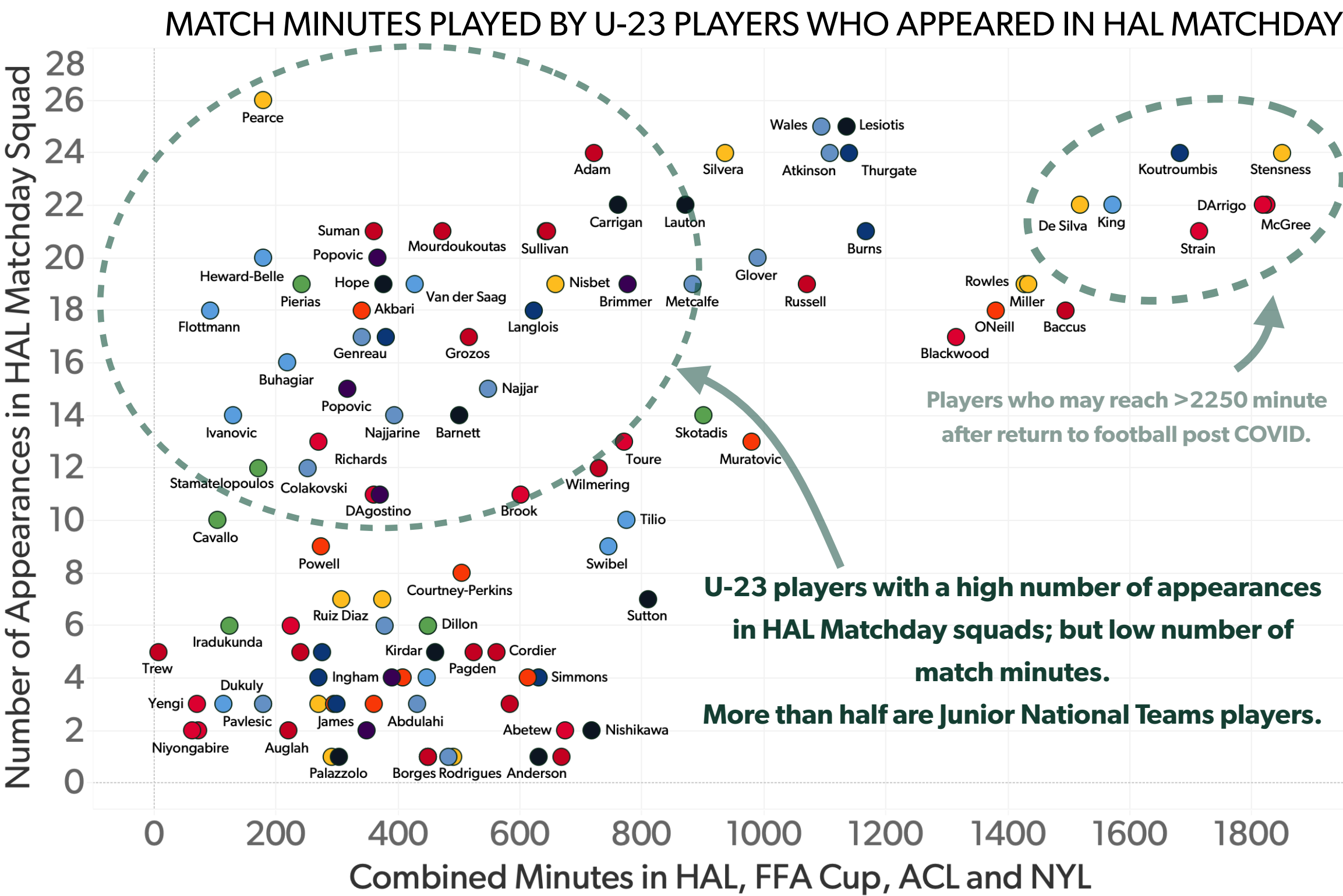
In 2015-16 the NYL was changed from a nation wide competition to a conference system based on location.

This makes it difficult to align schedules to the HAL teams.

Expansion Teams

Expansion clubs require time to build their NYL and Academy teams.

This limits the opportunities for contracted players to gain competitive matches minutes outside of the HAL.



NYL SCHEDULE CLASHES IN 2019

NYL SCHEDULE									
Game 1	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓
Game 2	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Game 3	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Game 4	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Game 5	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓
Game 6	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Game 7	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Game 8	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓



# WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT

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The profiling of HAL as having an Experienced Player Identity highlights that our domestic professional league is not providing sufficient opportunities for our talented youth footballers in comparison to leading nations such as Netherlands, Croatia, Belgium and Uruguay.

Changes in the NYL competition structure and the inclusion of varying age restrictions across both NYL and NPL have resulted in significantly reducing the opportunities for talented youth footballers to obtain match minutes in comparison to previous generations and other nations.

This significant reduction in available match minutes during a critical development stage for youth footballers has led to many Australian youth national team representatives exiting the professional game prematurely; namely those born in 1990, and 1995 – 97.

Australia has the second lowest match minutes available compared to the other leading national leagues. Only 19% of these minutes are played by players under the age of 23, the equivalent of two players from a starting 11.

Data across 35 leading professional leagues shows that there is no relationship between Points Per Game and % of Match Minutes played by U23s. The perception that playing youth players poses a material risk on match results is unfounded; there have been multiple league champions where the majority of match minutes were played by players under the age of 23.

Australia has a healthy number of professional footballers under the age of 23 when comparing to other leading nations. However, 97% of these players do not obtain 2250 minutes per season which significantly diminishes their opportunity for career progression.

The Performance Gap is already having an impact on the current national team player pool; there are only 34 Australians under the age of 30 who played more than 2250 minutes in 2018-19 (Japan had 97). This will likely result in Australia having one of its oldest squads at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™.

Only 15% of transfers in football occur in the 30+ Experienced Player bracket, which contributes only 6% of transfer fees in the global transfer market. Production Identity leagues averaged \$65.35M USD each last season, compared to Australia's \$1.9M USD.

More than half (55%) of Australians who play more than 2250 minutes in a HAL season, before they turn 23, are sold overseas for a transfer fee.

Australian youth national teams are significantly underprepared at major tournaments in comparison to other Asian nations. This can also hinder the development of our leading youth representatives due to the lack of international match exposure.

There are multiple challenges that talented players must navigate to fulfil their potential within the current youth system; age restrictions, contracting, competition scheduling and competition structure are key areas to review.



