



Westfield
MATILDAS

WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE GAP

**BUILDING AND SUSTAINING AN ELITE
MATILDAS TEAM FOR 2023 AND BEYOND**

PUBLISHED DECEMBER 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In late June 2020, Australia, alongside New Zealand, was awarded the right to host the FIFA Women's World Cup™ in 2023. The announcement, made by FIFA President Gianni Infantino at FIFA's headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland, sparked mass jubilation across the Australian football and sporting fraternity, as the news that the world's third largest sporting event will be heading to Asia-Pacific in just three years' time began to sink in.

Australia has performed commendably and competitively at senior FIFA Women's World Cups™ in the past, qualifying for the knockout phase at the last four times of asking (2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019). On home soil in 2023, the team will receive fanfare and attention like never before, carrying the hopes of a nation as Australia and New Zealand welcomes the world for the first-ever 32-nation FIFA Women's World Cup™.

The following report has been compiled with the intent of offering an objective snapshot into the current landscape facing Australia's elite, and prospectively elite, female footballers. Considering factors both at home and abroad, the report compares Australia with eleven other leading female football nations across both senior and youth international football, and domestic/continental club competitions. The report offers findings to complement discussion, decision making, and strategy in the build-up to 2023 and beyond, with the intention that Australia's finest female footballers – the Matildas – be provided with the best possible runway to excel on home soil in 2023.

Key findings of the report include that:

- Australia has a strong 'Core' of National Team players, however compared with other leading nations the opportunity for 'Fringe' players to obtain crucial match minutes against diverse opponents is lacking;
- Australia's Senior National Team squad depth is the lowest of the 12 nations analysed, with just eight players having debuted for the Matildas since 2017. Of these eight players, only two have played over 200 match minutes for Australia (Karly Roestbakken and Jenna McCormick);
- Australia's reliance on its 'Core' players is creating a prospectively detrimental cycle whereby a number of Australia's leading players are playing considerable match minutes for both club and country. 'Core' Matildas Alanna Kennedy (1st in world), Steph Catley (3rd), Sam Kerr (4th), Tameka Yallop (11th), and Lydia Williams (19th) are in the global top 20 for match minutes over the last four-year cycle. While this enables these players to continue to compete at a high level, it also heightens their individual risk of injury, while at the same time minimising the opportunity for 'Fringe' players to receive crucial match minutes;
- Compared with the other 11 nations in the report, Australia has played the second fewest senior international matches over the last four-year cycle (44). USA played 68, Japan 53. Australia also benchmarks low in both senior and youth matches against European opposition – nations that routinely excel at FIFA Women's World Cups™;
- Australia, along with Brazil, oversee the fewest number of Youth International Programs compared with the 12 nations studied. Australia and Brazil oversee three programs, while England, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, and the United States, each oversee seven. Additionally, Australia played the fewest number of international matches at youth level between 2016 and 2020 (57). By way of comparison, USA, Norway, Germany and France each played 200+, highlighting the development opportunity gap that exists for Australia's 'Young' players;
- And finally, Australia's domestic league structure – with a maximum of 14 games on offer – allows for just 113,444 match minutes, compared to the Case Study League average of 291,660 minutes. This environment restricts the opportunity for 'Young' players to hit the 2,160 competitive match minute benchmark by the age of 21 – a figure/age demonstrated to assist players who reach the benchmark to progress to the senior national team and/or opportunities abroad.

Football Australia extends its thanks to the numerous people and organisations that contributed to the compilation of this report. Former Matildas staff members Ante Milicic, Ivan Jolic, and Kate Cohen were fundamental to its development, while Football Australia Girls Development Pathways Manager, Debbie Fisher, and Football Australia Statistician, Andrew Howe, each assisted in the data collection process. Football Australia also extends its gratitude to StatsPerform and US Soccer who went above and beyond to provide key data, as well as to many members of Football Australia's Technical and National Teams Staff who assisted at various stages throughout.



SENIOR INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

INTERNATIONAL AGE PROFILES

Defining National Team Age Profiles

Senior National Team appearances for all 12 Case Study Nations were analysed across a four-year cycle — from 2017 to 2020 — in order to define the Age Profile of each National Team.

Across all 12 teams, international match minutes from 598 games were collected.

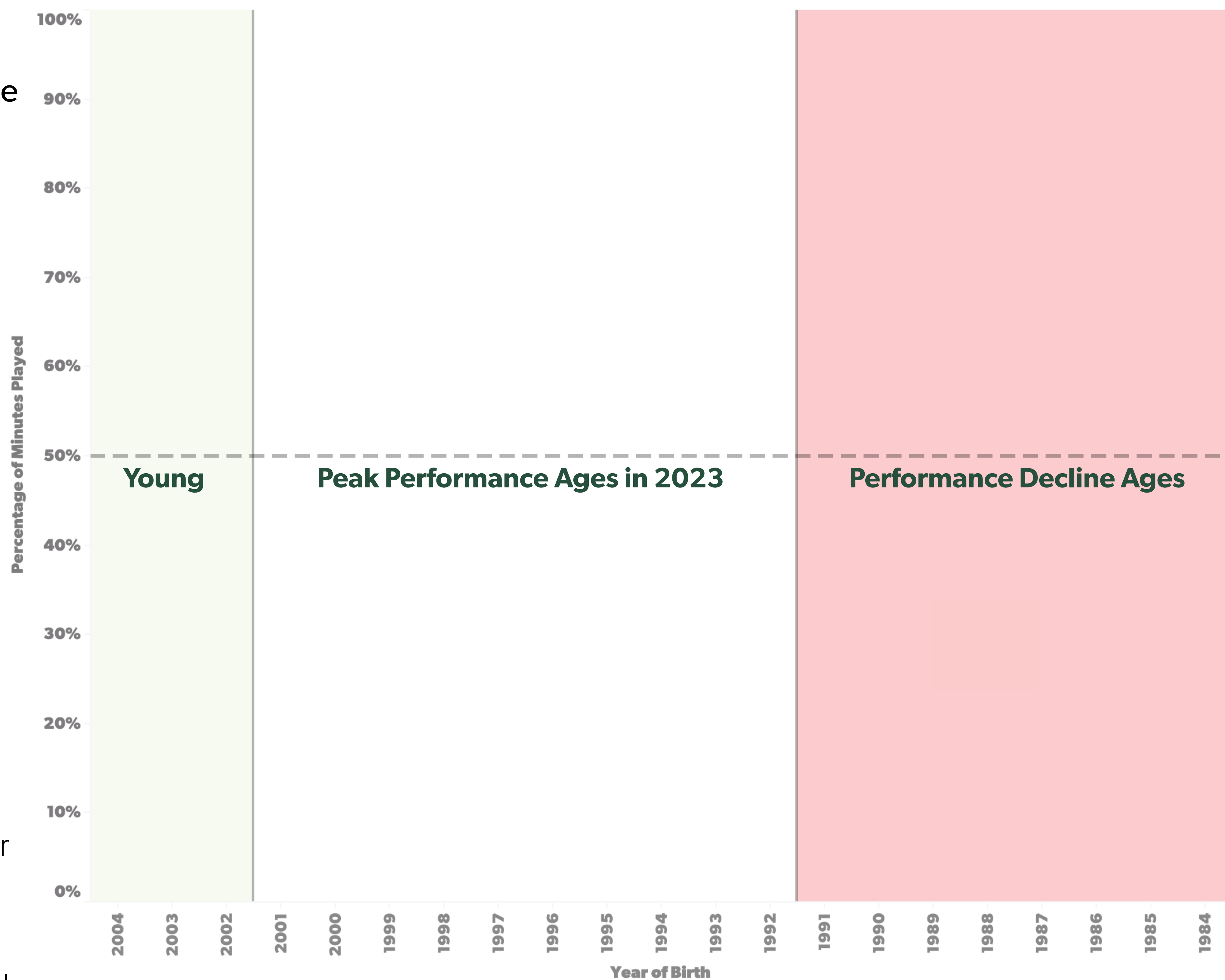
The example on the right helps us define the Age Profiles of each Senior National Team.

The horizontal dotted line represents 50% of all match minutes for the respective National Teams.

Players who sit above that line are defined as 'Core' National Team players. Players who sit below that line are defined as 'Fringe' National Team players over the four-year cycle analysed.

The graph is also divided into three vertical sections, based on the age the players will be at the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia/New Zealand 2023™:

- **Green:** 'Young' players who will be 21 or younger
- **White:** 'Peak Performance' aged players who will be 22 to 31
- **Red:** 'Performance Decline' aged players who will be 32 or older



Using this graphic, we were able to objectively analyse the 12 Case Study Senior National Teams and identify trends with squad Age Profiles. We were able to identify which Senior National Teams fit the following building towards the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia/New Zealand 2023™:

- **Number of 'Core' Players:** Which countries have a high number of players who have played >50% of minutes over the four-year cycle?
- **A 'Peak Performance Aged Core':** Which countries have 'Core' players who are also in the 'Peak Performance' age bracket in 2023?
- **Number of 'Fringe' Players:** Which countries have a high number of 'Fringe' players over the four-year cycle?
- **'Fringe' players in 'Peak Performance Ages':** Which countries have 'Fringe' players who will be in the 'Peak Performance' age bracket in 2023?

NATIONAL TEAM AGE PROFILES	AUS	BRA	ENG	FRA	GER	ITA	JPN	NED	NOR	ESP	SWE	USA
NUMBER OF CORE PLAYERS	11	6	7	8	7	10	6	11	8	8	9	9
PEAK AGED CORE PLAYERS	7	2	2	4	3	3	3	6	6	5	4	5
NUMBER OF FRINGE PLAYERS	27	52	38	43	41	31	50	32	33	39	38	35
PEAK AGED FRINGE PLAYERS	18	29	21	28	27	19	40	25	23	30	25	21
TOTAL NUMBER OF PLAYERS USED FROM 17-20	38	58	45	51	48	41	56	43	41	47	47	44

Australia tops the charts when it comes to the number of 'Core' and 'Peak Aged Core' players used in the four-year cycle.

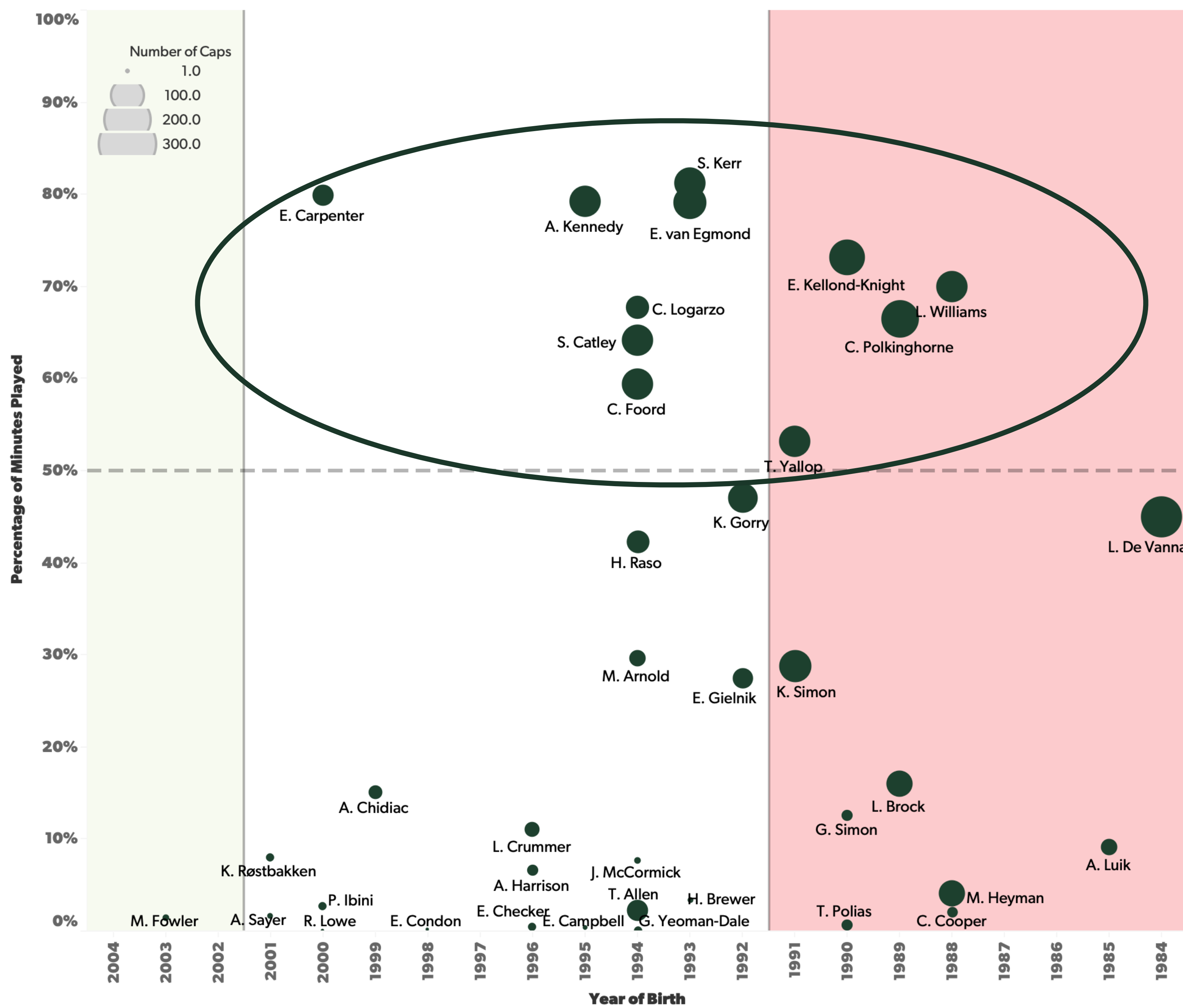
However, Australia sits at the bottom for both 'Fringe Players' and 'Peak Aged Fringe Players'.

Australia has also used the fewest number of players over the four-year cycle.

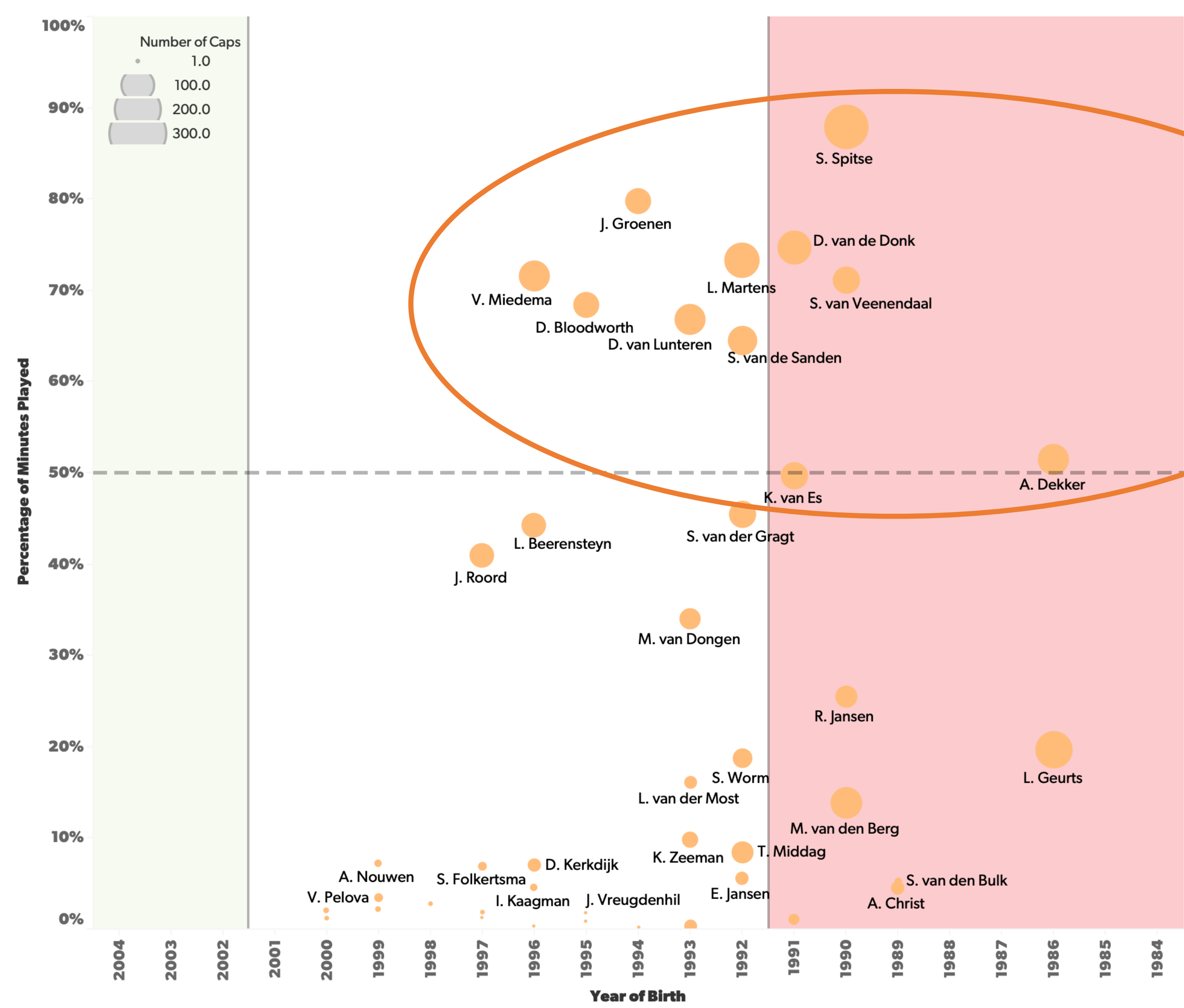
INTERNATIONAL AGE PROFILES

National Team Age Profiles

Australia



Netherlands



Both Australia and Netherlands have 11 'Core' National Team players. However, Australia has just 27 'Fringe' National Team players.

Australia and Netherlands' Senior National teams have similar Age Profiles. Both countries have relied on a strong 'Core' of players who play a large amount of match minutes. Both Australia and Netherlands have 11 players who have played >50% of minutes in the four-year cycle. The majority of this 'Core' is also in the Peak Performance ages for the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia/New Zealand 2023™.

However, when it comes to 'Fringe' National Team players, Australia and Netherlands differ.

Australia has the fewest 'Fringe' National Team players of all Case Study Nations — with just 27. This indicates Australia lacks squad depth, and is overly reliant on its 'Core' of regular players, with limited options coming through.

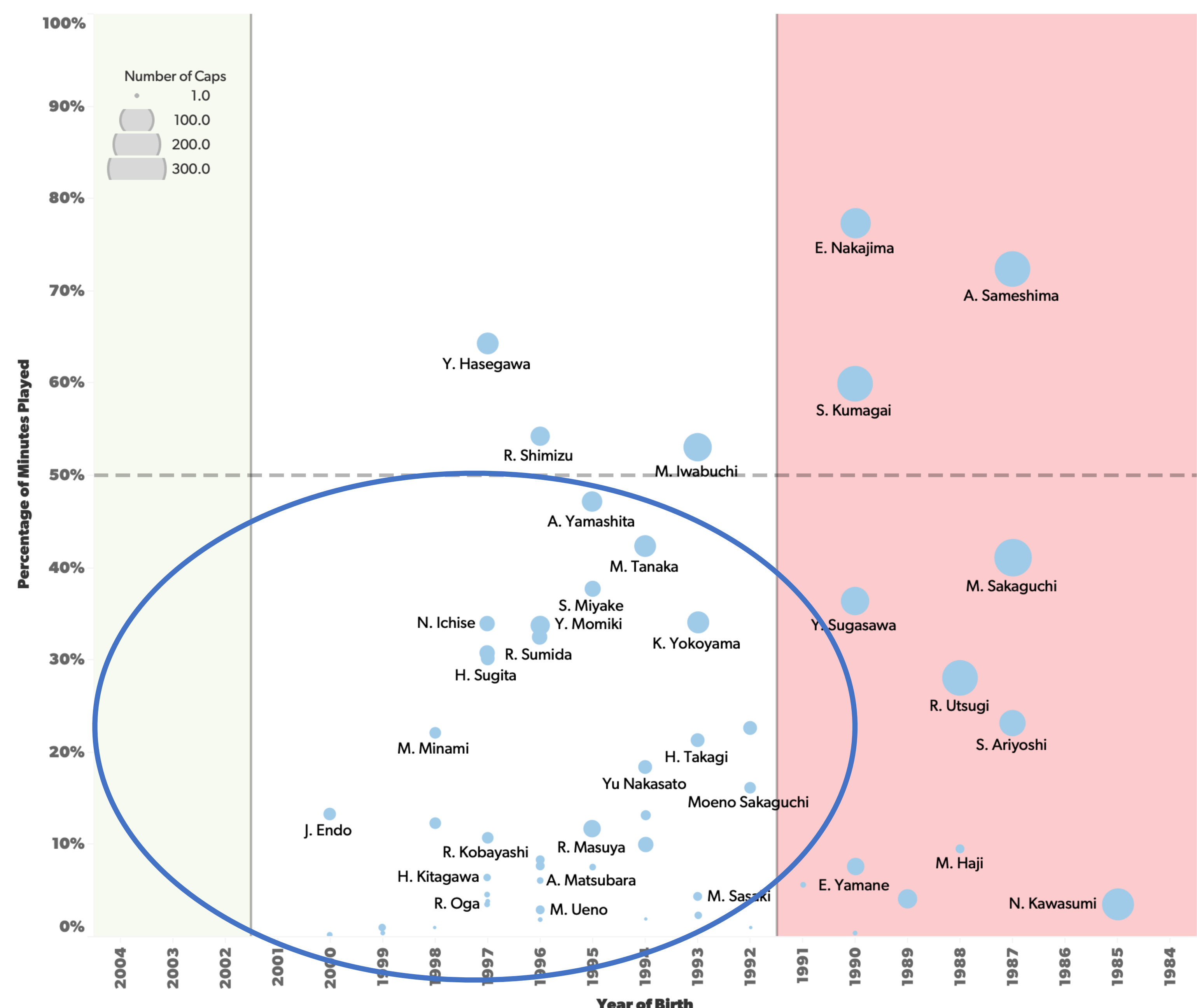
Netherlands has 32 'Fringe' players. The average number of 'Fringe' players across the 12 Case Study Nations is 38.

In contrast to Australia, Japan have the fewest number of 'Core' National Team players — with just six.

Japan

Yet Japan have 50 'Fringe' players who have amassed National Team minutes during the four-year cycle researched.

Of these 50 Japan 'Fringe' players, 40 will be in the Peak Performance age range at the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia/New Zealand 2023™



Japan has just six 'Core' National Team Players. However, they have 40 'Fringe' National Team Players in Peak Performance Ages in 2023.

AGE PROFILE SUMMARY

The long held assumption that Australia relies on a strong 'Core' of National Team players is accurate. And seven of the 11 'Core' National Team players will be in Peak Performance ages in 2023.

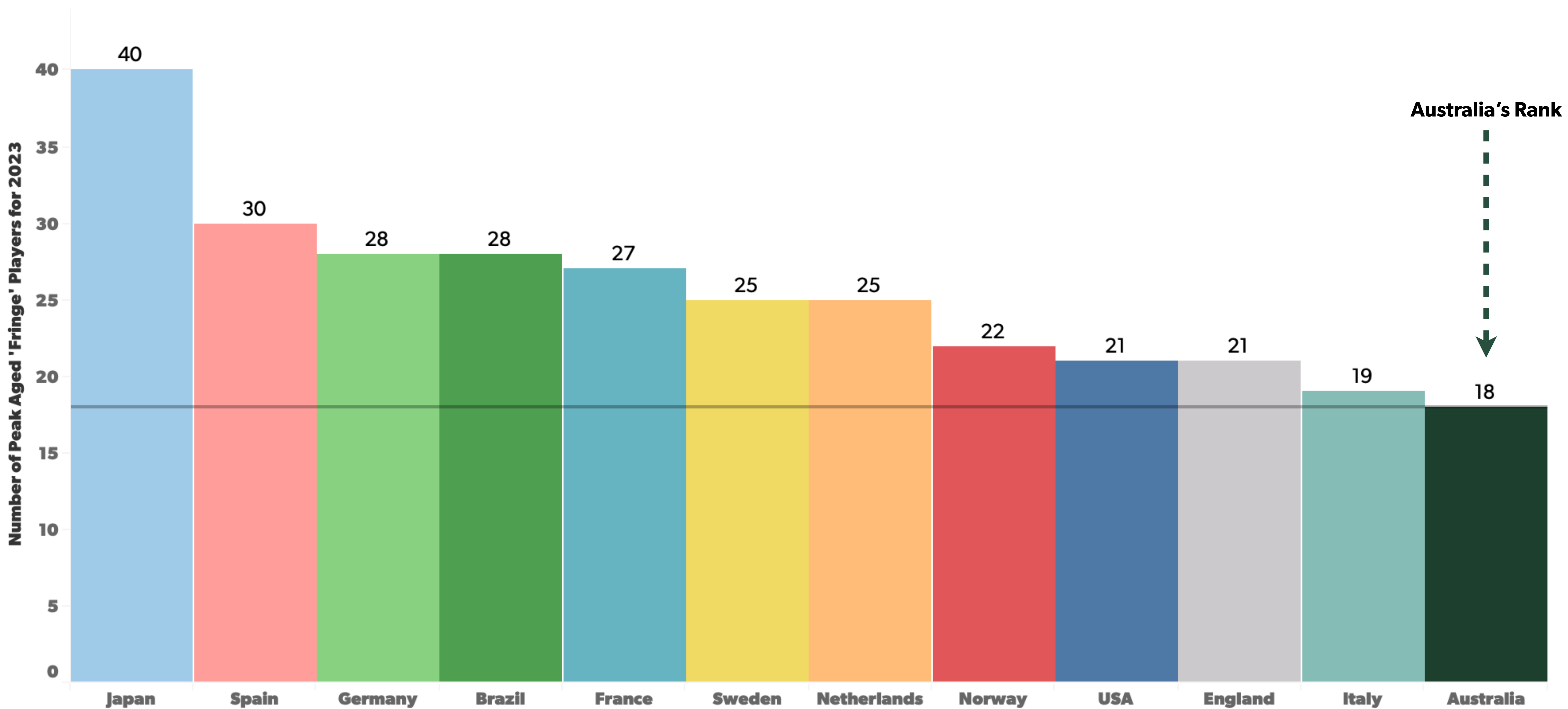
However, another long held assumption — that Australia lacks squad depth — is also accurate.

Australia has just 27 'Fringe' National Team players — the fewest of the 12 Case Study Nations researched. The average is 38.

Just 18 of the 27 'Fringe' players will be in Peak Performance ages in 2023. This is also the fewest of the 12 Case Study Nations, with the average being 26.

INTERNATIONAL SQUAD DEPTH

Analysing National Team 'Squad Depth'



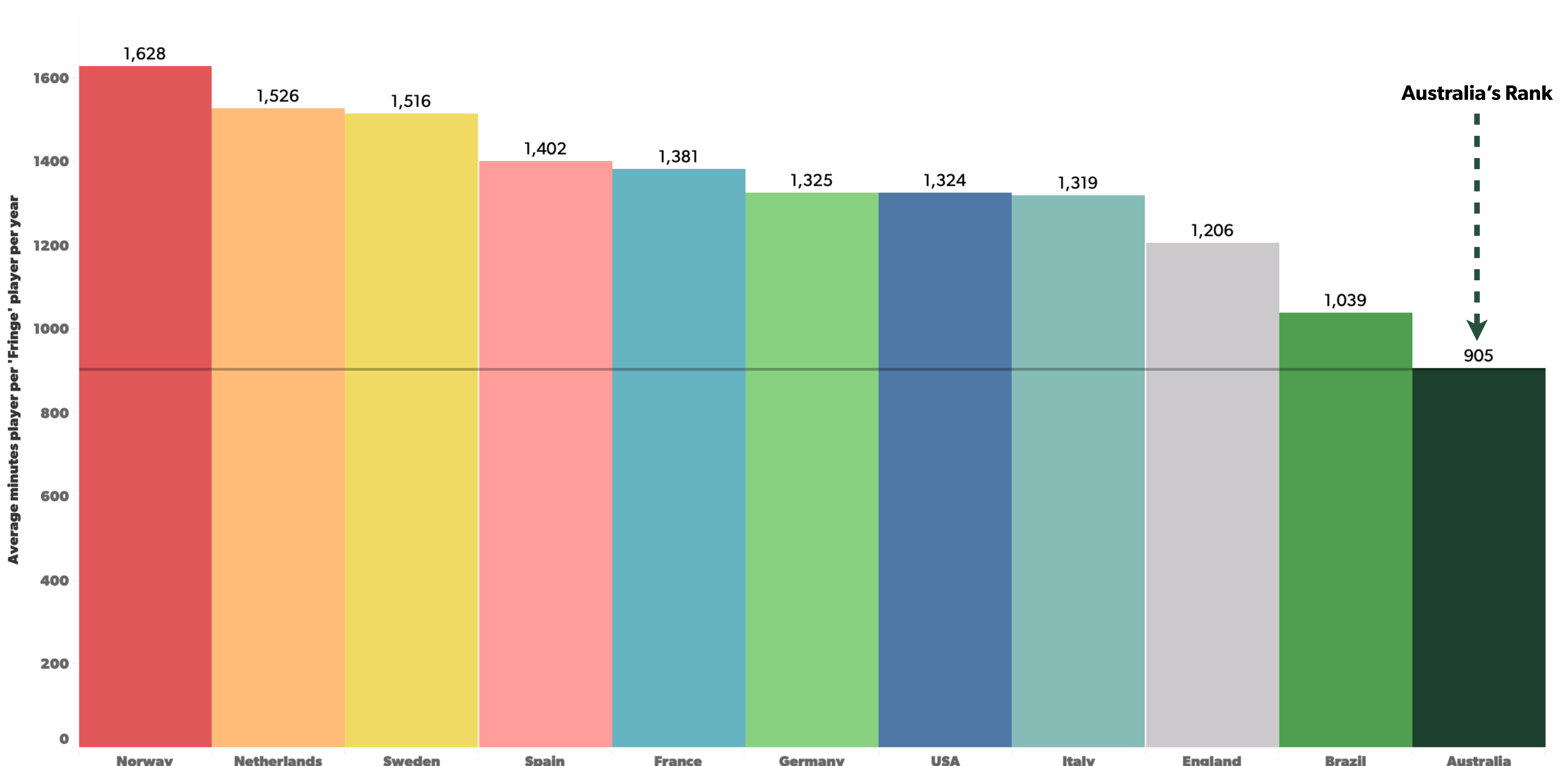
Graph 1: Australia has just 18 'Fringe' players who will be in the 'Peak Performance' age bracket in 2023. By contrast, Japan has 40.

Not only does Australia have the fewest number of 'Fringe' players in the 'Peak Performance' age bracket in 2023, these 'Fringe' players also play far less club football than their counterparts from other National Teams.

Australia's 18 'Fringe' players have played an average of just 905 match minutes per player per year. This means, on average, Australia's 'Fringe' National Team players — who will be in the 'Peak Performance' age bracket in 2023 — average just ten full 90 minute matches, per player, per year.

By contrast, 'Fringe' players from countries such as Norway, Netherlands and Sweden average over 1,500 club match minutes per year — or over 16 full 90 minute games per year.

The average 'Fringe' Norwegian National Team player plays nearly double the amount of club football when compared to Australia's 'Fringe' National Team players — 1,628 vs. 905 minutes per year.



Graph 2: Average match minutes per 'Fringe' National team player per year over a four-year cycle.

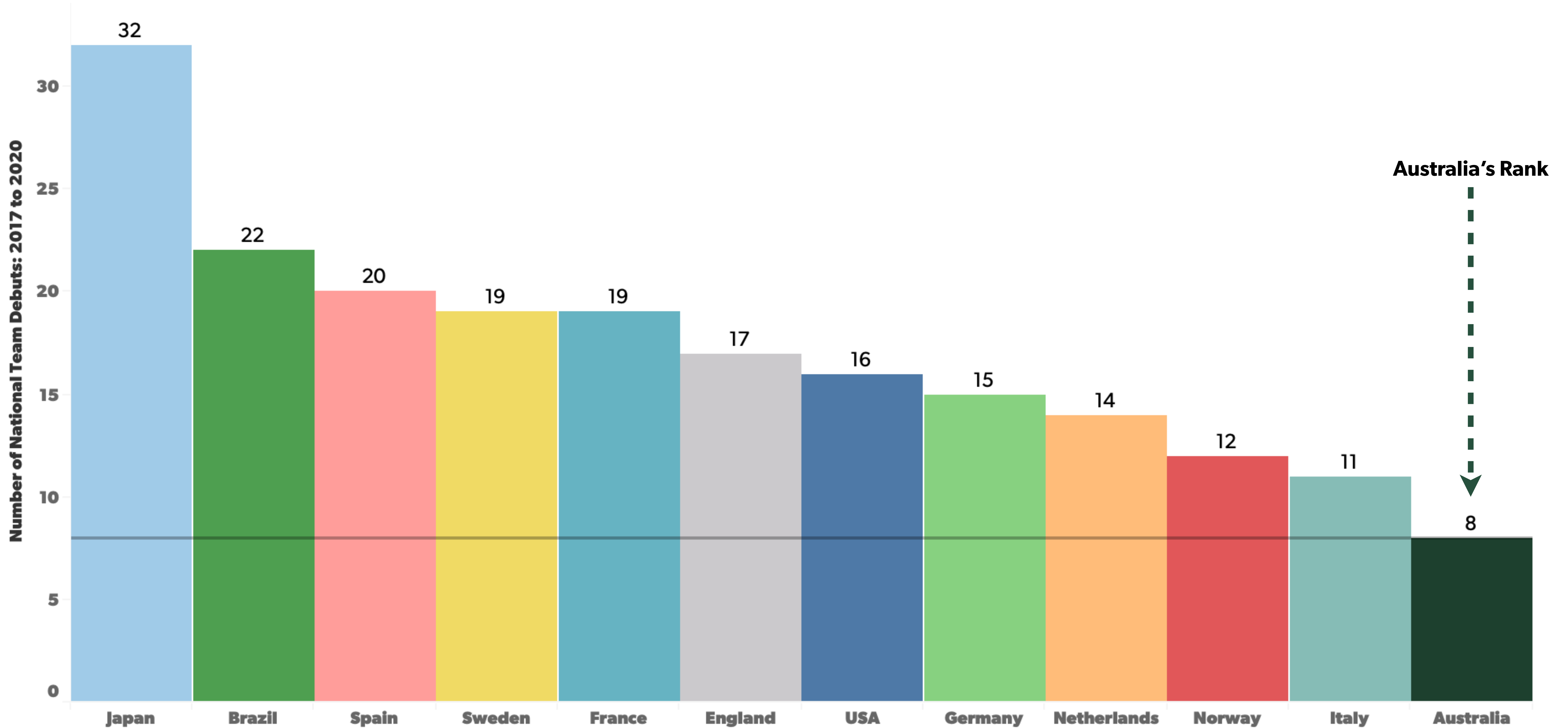
NOTE: Japan Nadeshiko club match minute data unavailable.

INTERNATIONAL SQUAD DEPTH

National Team Debutants

Since 2017, Australia has seen just eight players debut for the Matildas.

This is the fewest number of debutants of any country from the 12 Case Study Nations analysed.



Graph 1: Number of players who debuted for the National Team from 2017 to 2020.

Of Australia's eight debutants, only two players — Karly Roestbakken (320 minutes, in six games) and Jenna McCormick (311 minutes, in four games) — have played more than 200 match minutes for the National Team. Both debuted in 2019.

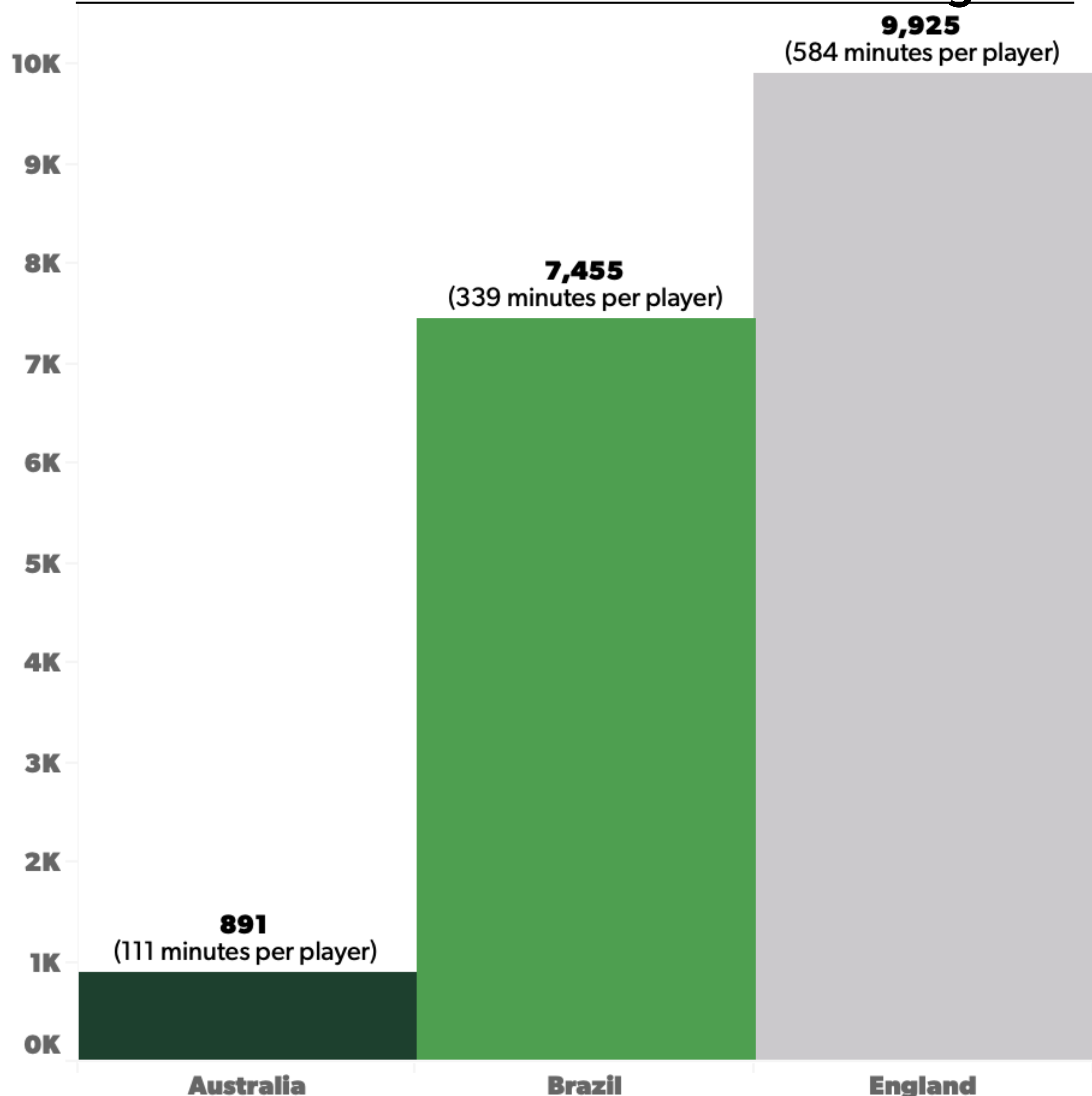
The six other debutants have played just 260 match minutes combined for Australia.

By contrast, England have undergone a strategic attempt to increase the depth of their Senior National Team. A total of 17 players have debuted since 2017, and during this time their debutants have amassed a total of 9,925 match minutes for England (at an average of 584 match minutes per player).

Even Brazil, the National Team with the most players who will be in the 'Performance Decline' age bracket by 2023, have seen 22 players debut since 2017.

These 22 debutants have amassed a total of 7,445 match minutes (at an average of 339 match minutes per player).

National Team Minutes played by players who debuted after 2017: Australia vs. Brazil vs. England:



SQUAD DEPTH SUMMARY

Despite having a strong 'Core' of players who play consistently for the National Team, Australia's 'Fringe' players play far less club football than their National Team counterparts.

This produces a performance gap that they struggle to overcome, unable to bridge the gap by playing consistent high level club football to then play for the National Team.

A 'Fringe' National Team player from Norway will play nearly twice the amount of club football than Australia's 'Fringe'.

Australia has debuted the fewest number of players since 2017.

These players have amassed far fewer international match minutes than players who have debuted for other countries.

Graph 2: Total international minutes played by Debutants since 2017

AUSTRALIA'S 'CORE' vs. THE REST

Defining the Extent of Australia's 'Gap' to Bridge

Australia's lack of Squad Depth has left its national team overly reliant on a small 'Core' of players who play the majority of minutes. This, combined with these 'Core' players historically juggling two club seasons per year, has left Australia at risk of a dangerous cycle:

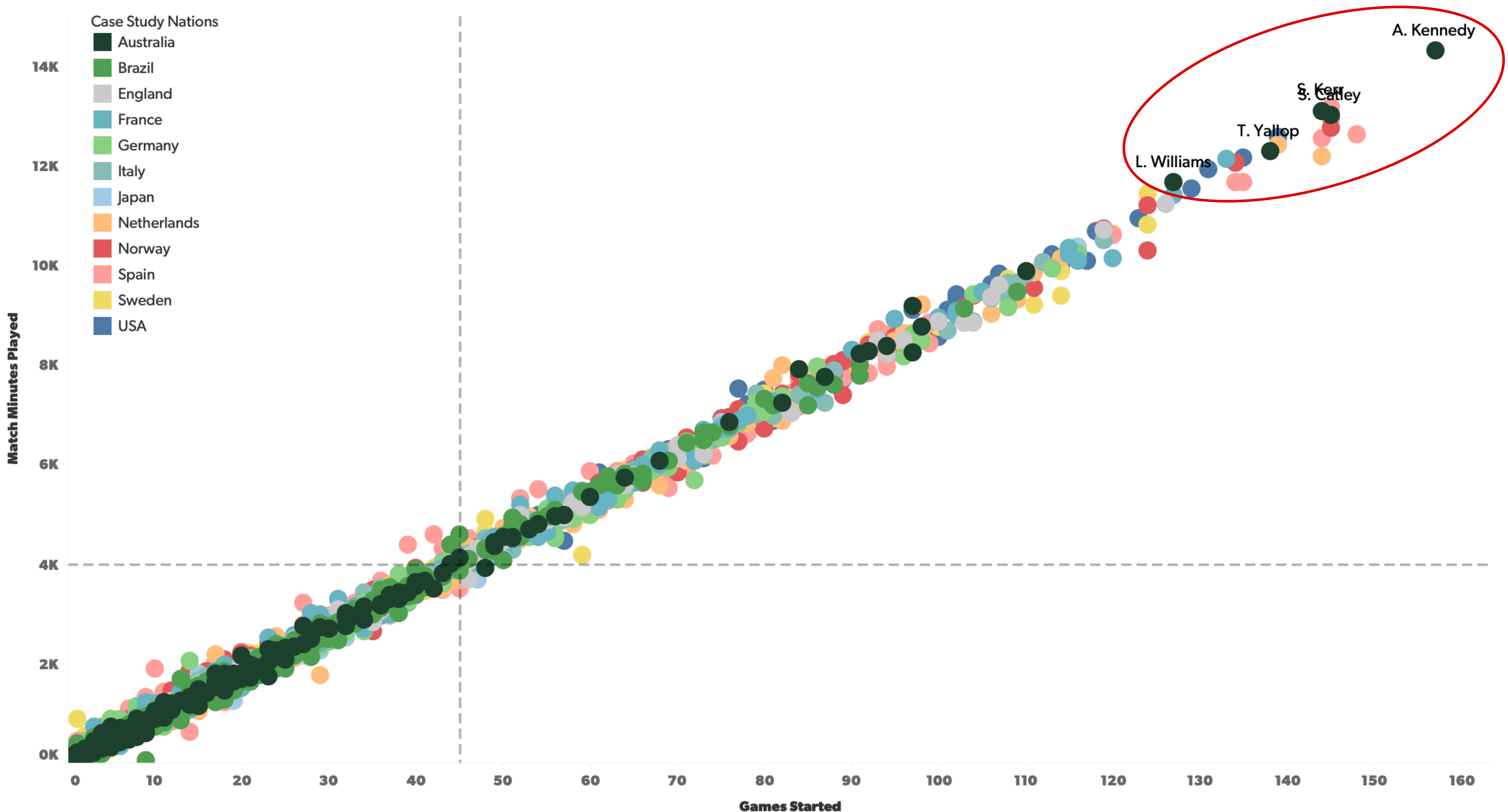
- There is an increasing reliance on a small Core of players
- This leads to fewer opportunities to new Fringe players to debut and establish themselves
- The Fringe players then struggle to bridge the gap in experience and quality to the Core players
- Meaning the small Core players are again increasingly relied upon to play as often and as much as possible

Matildas Head Physiotherapist David Battersby summarised this virtuous cycle, highlighting an increase injury risk brought to the fore by an over-reliance on a small 'Core' of national team players.

"There is a limited number of players with extensive international experience," said Battersby, who has been involved with the Matildas since 2012. "Whilst this may certainly be advantageous ... it does make the team vulnerable to significant injuries to key players in key positions."

"The consequence of this small playing pool is that key players play more minutes, with less opportunity to be rested. This exposure factor has the potential to compound the effects of both age and the injury histories of the key players involved."

"It's also worth noting that many of the players have heavy club schedules, also required to play a higher number of minutes."



Graph 1: Australia has played the fewest number of international opponents in the four-year cycle analysed.

Over 4,850 players' match minutes were analysed across the 12 Case Study national teams and leagues.

When analysing international and domestic match minutes played over a four-year period there were three Australians among the top five in the world:

- Alanna Kennedy (ranked one in the world)
- Samantha Kerr (ranked three in the world)
- Stephanie Catley (ranked four in the world)

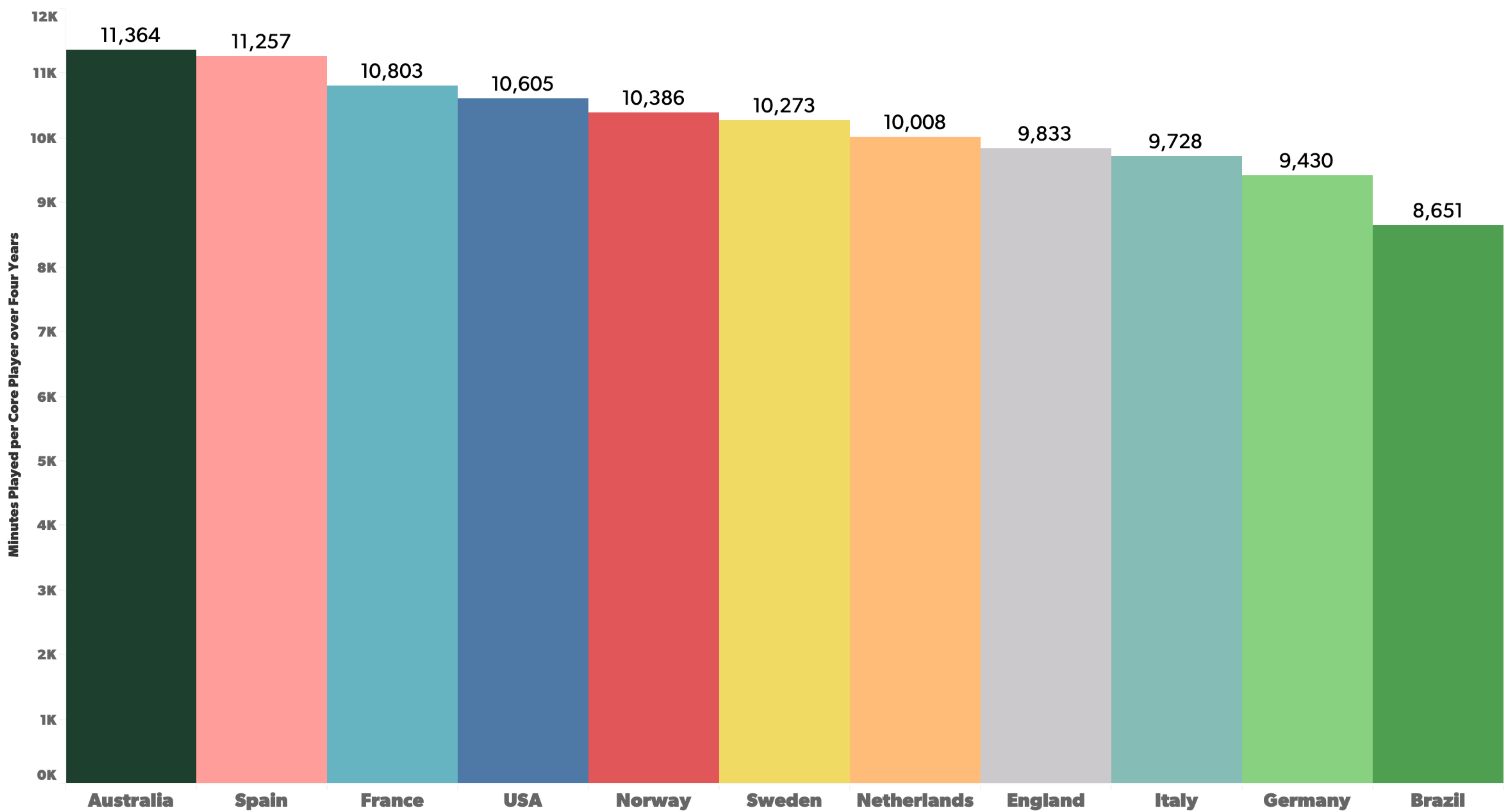
Alanna Kennedy has played more match minutes, and started more games for club and country, than any women's player in the world over the four-year period analysed.

Australian 'Core' international players Tameka Yallop (ranked 11) and Lydia Williams (ranked 19) are also in the global Top 20.

AUSTRALIA'S 'CORE' vs. THE REST

As outlined in Graph 2 on Page 7, Australia's 'Fringe' players play significantly fewer match minutes than their counterparts. This is made even more noticeable when analysing the match minutes played by each country's 'Core' players.

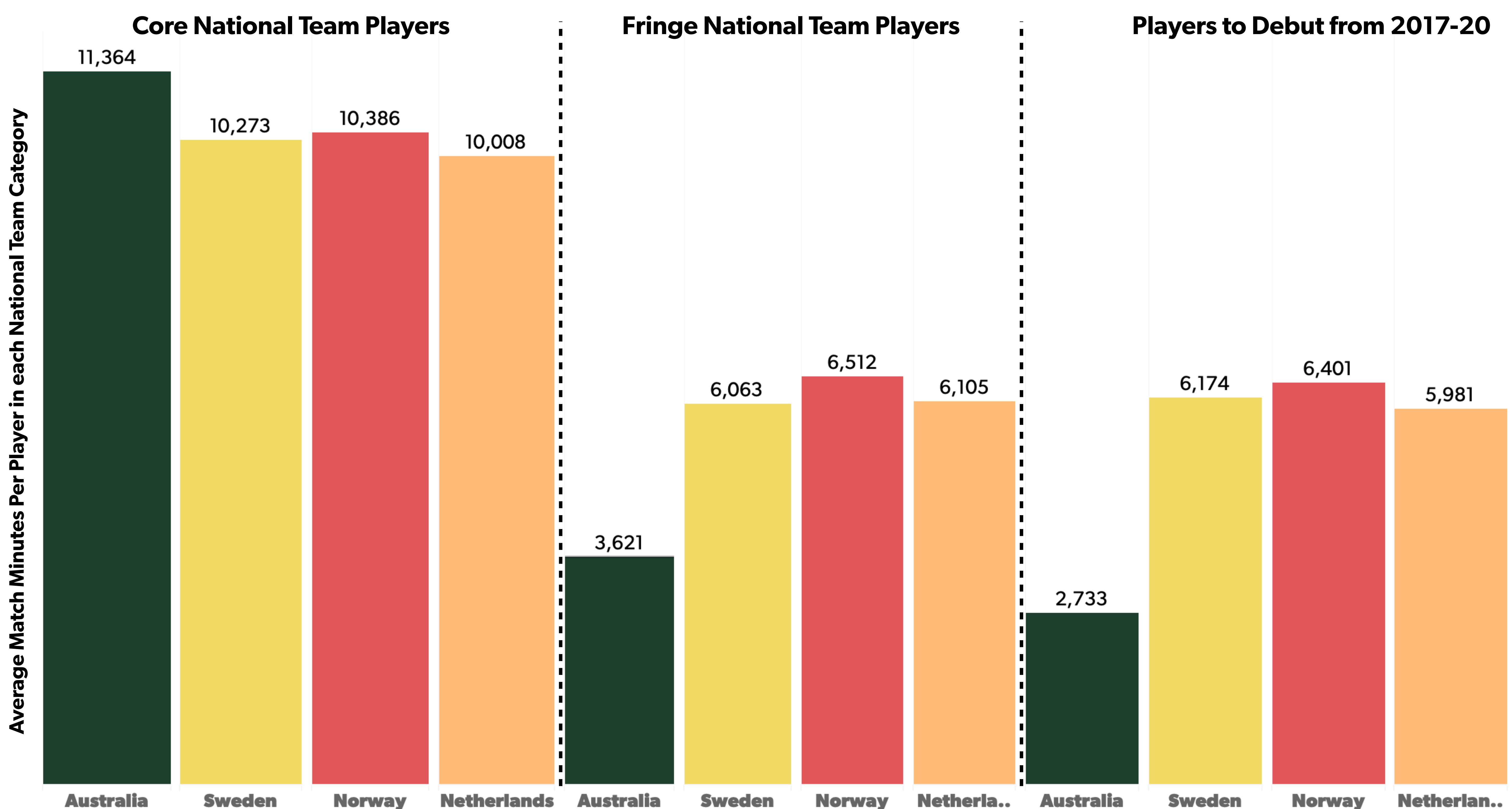
Australia's 'Core' of players have averaged over 11,300 match minutes over the four-year period analysed.



Graph 1: Match minutes played on average by 'Core' national team players for club and country over a four-year period.

While Australia's 'Core' players play a huge volume of match minutes for club and country, the 'Fringe' players play the fewest of all 12 Case Study Nations analysed.

And for the Australian players to debut for their national teams in the last four years, they too have played far less football than their international counterparts over the time period analysed.



Graph 2: Australia's 'Fringe' National Team players play just 32% of the minutes played by 'Core' players. Players to Debut play just 24%.

By comparison, Norway's 'Fringe' players play 62% of the minutes played by 'Core' players. Players to Debut also play 62%.

INTERNATIONAL MATCH ACTIVITY

Number of Games | By Confederation Opponent

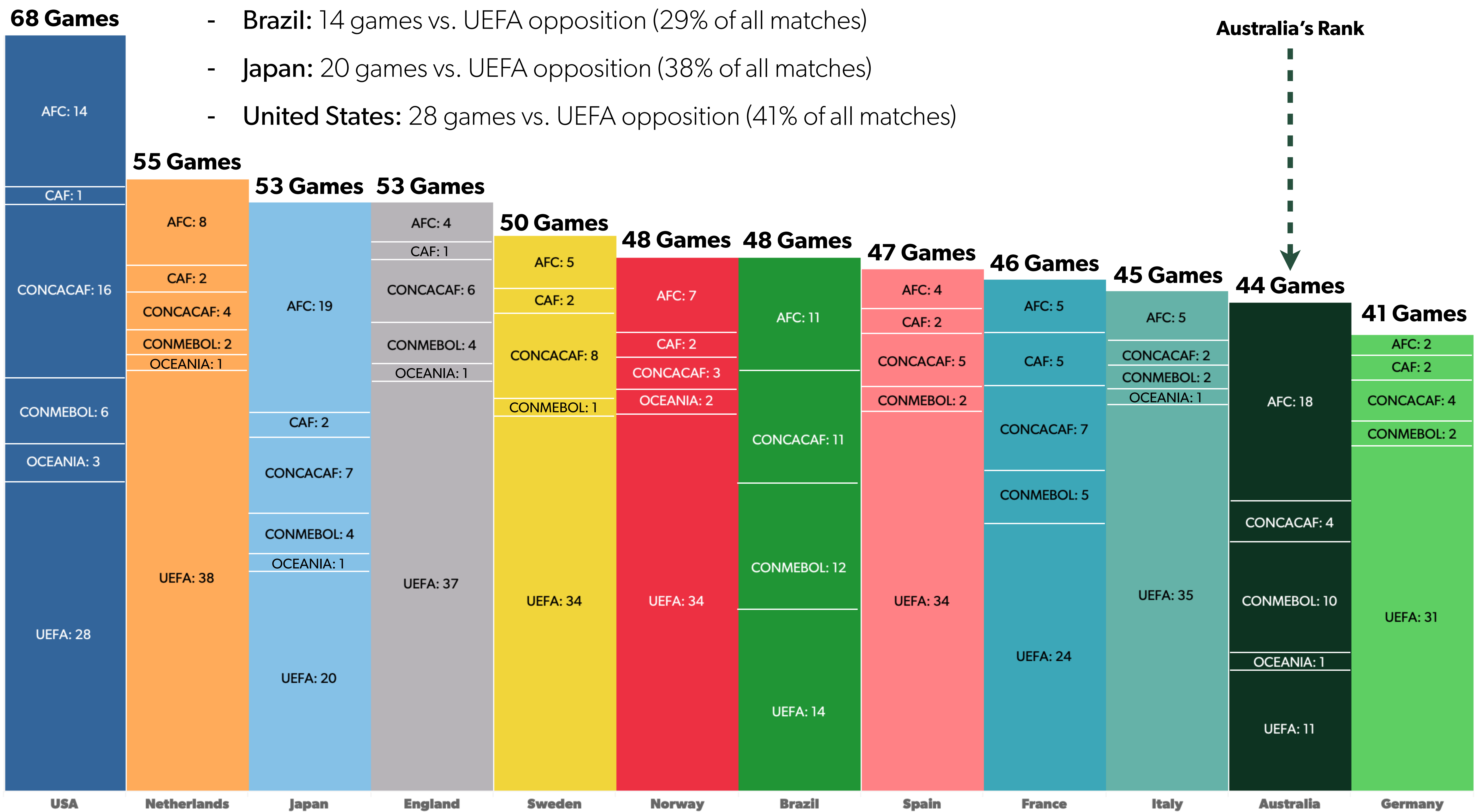
Analysing all Senior National Team games played by the 12 Case Study Nations from 2017 to 2020, some clear insights emerge. The USA have played by far the most international games with 68 — far higher than the Case Study Nation average of 50.

Germany, with 41 international games, have played the least, with Australia second least for senior international activity.

Notably, Australia has played the fewest number of international games against UEFA opponents — just 11 games in four years.

Countries from non-UEFA confederations have all played more UEFA opponents during this time:

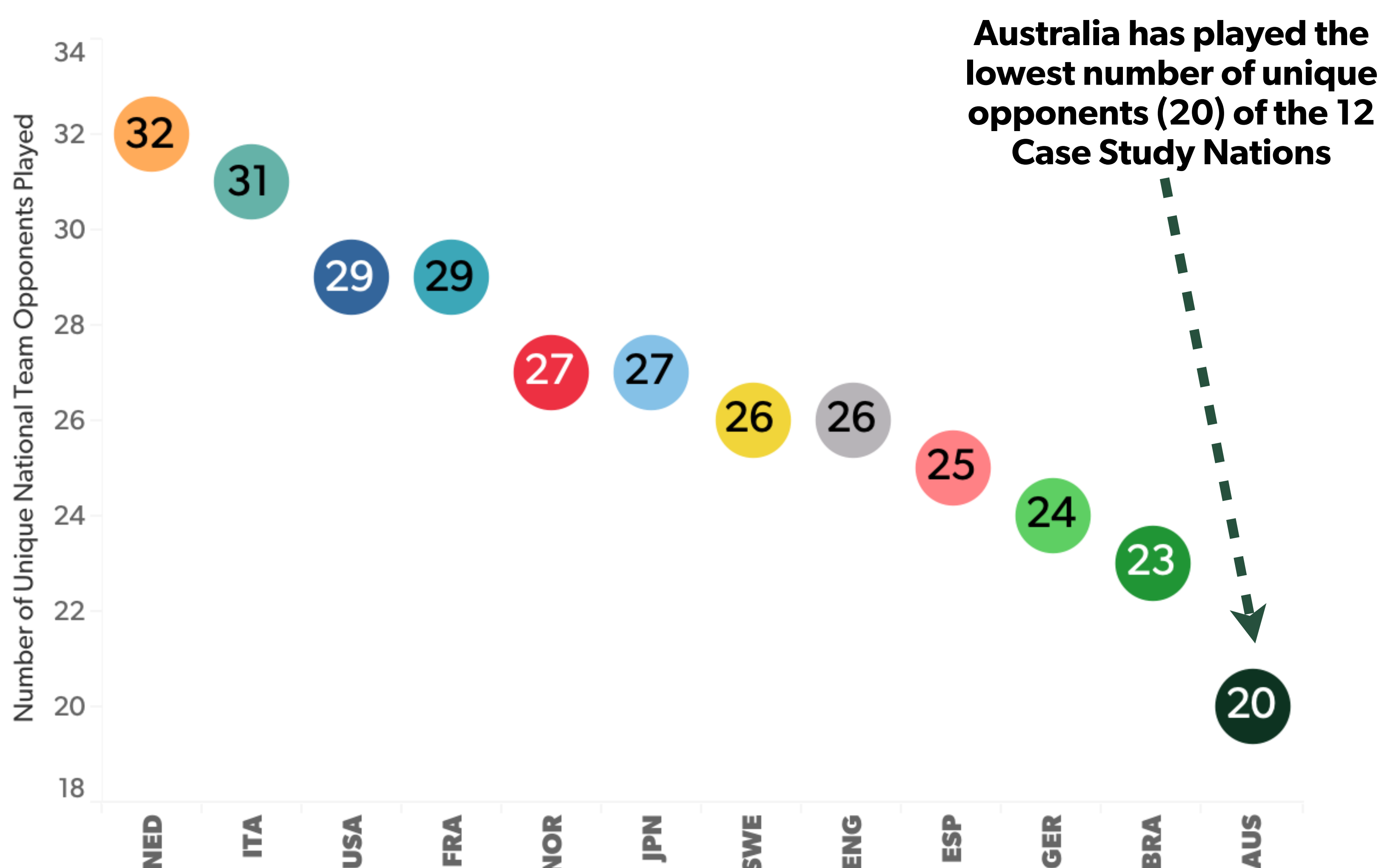
- **Australia:** 11 games vs. UEFA opposition (25% of all matches)
- **Brazil:** 14 games vs. UEFA opposition (29% of all matches)
- **Japan:** 20 games vs. UEFA opposition (38% of all matches)
- **United States:** 28 games vs. UEFA opposition (41% of all matches)



Graph 1: Only Germany have played fewer games from 2017 to 2020. Notably, Australia have played the fewest number of games vs. UEFA opposition.

Australia has also played the fewest number of unique international opponents. Netherlands played 32 different international opponents, compared to Australia's 20.

The average over the 12 Case Study Nations was to play against 27 unique international opponents over the four-year cycle.



Graph 2: Australia has played the fewest games against unique opponents in the four-year cycle analysed.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Australia has played 44 games over the last four-year cycle. Only Germany has played fewer matches. The international benchmark — USA — has played 68 games during this period. The AFC benchmark — Japan — has played 53 games.

Australia, who has earned a reputation of struggling against organised UEFA opponents, has also played the fewest number of games versus European opponents.

Not only does Australia play fewer games against UEFA opposition, the Matildas have also played the fewest number of unique international opponents. As a result, there is a risk that Australia is less able to develop its playing style against the broadest range of opposition styles possible.



YOUTH INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

YOUTH INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

National Team Programs Covered

Youth International Activity from 2016 to 2020 was analysed to identify trends in how often each Case Study Nation plays, and across what age groups for their youth national teams.

The time period was extended out to 2016, as opposed to starting from 2017, in order to capture two full Asian Football Confederation Under-16 and Under-19 youth cycles.

Australia, along with Brazil, oversee the fewest number of Youth International Programs — each running three programs.

By contrast, five of the 12 Case Study Nations oversee seven Youth International Programs — with England, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden and the United States operated Under-15s through to Under-23 aged youth teams.

YOUTH TEAM PROGRAMS	AUS	BRA	ENG	FRA	GER	ITA	JPN	NED	NOR	ESP	SWE	USA
UNDER 15s	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
UNDER 16s	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
UNDER 17s	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
UNDER 18s	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
UNDER 19s	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
UNDER 20s	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
UNDER 23s	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
NUMBER OF YOUTH TEAM PROGRAMS	3	3	7	5	5	4	7	7	6	4	7	7

Graph 1: Australia and Brazil run three Youth International Programs, while England, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden and United States run seven.

Qualifying for Youth World Cups — since 2006

When analysing how many times each Case Study Nation has qualified for Under-17 and Under-20 World Cups, Australia also sits last.

Australia last qualified for a Women's Youth World Cup in 2006. Australia have never qualified for an Under-17 Women's World Cup since it was established in 2008.

By contrast, Japan have qualified for 13 Youth World Cups — seven at Under-17 level and six at Under-20 level — through AFC. The United States (CONCACAF) and Brazil (CONMEBOL) also dominate qualification through their respective confederations. While Germany have also qualified for 13 Youth World Cups through the UEFA Confederation.

U17, U20 WORLD CUPS	AUS	BRA	ENG	FRA	GER	ITA	JPN	NED	NOR	ESP	SWE	USA
UNDER 17s	0	5	2	2	6	1	7	0	0	4	0	4
UNDER 20s	1	7	4	8	7	1	6	2	2	3	2	8
TOTAL WORLD CUPS PLAYED IN	1	12	6	10	13	2	13	2	2	7	2	12

Graph 2: Number of FIFA Under-17 and Under-20 Women's World Cups each Case Study Nation has qualified for since 2006.

YOUTH INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

Amount of Youth International Activity

Using published fixture information on each Case Study Nations' Federation website, we were able to calculate the amount of Youth National Team games played from 2016 to the time of writing in 2020.

These Youth National Team games were then classified as: Qualifying Games, Tournament Games or Friendly Games.

Australia — with 57 Youth National Team games in just over four years — have played the fewest number of matches of the 12 Case Study Nations analysed.

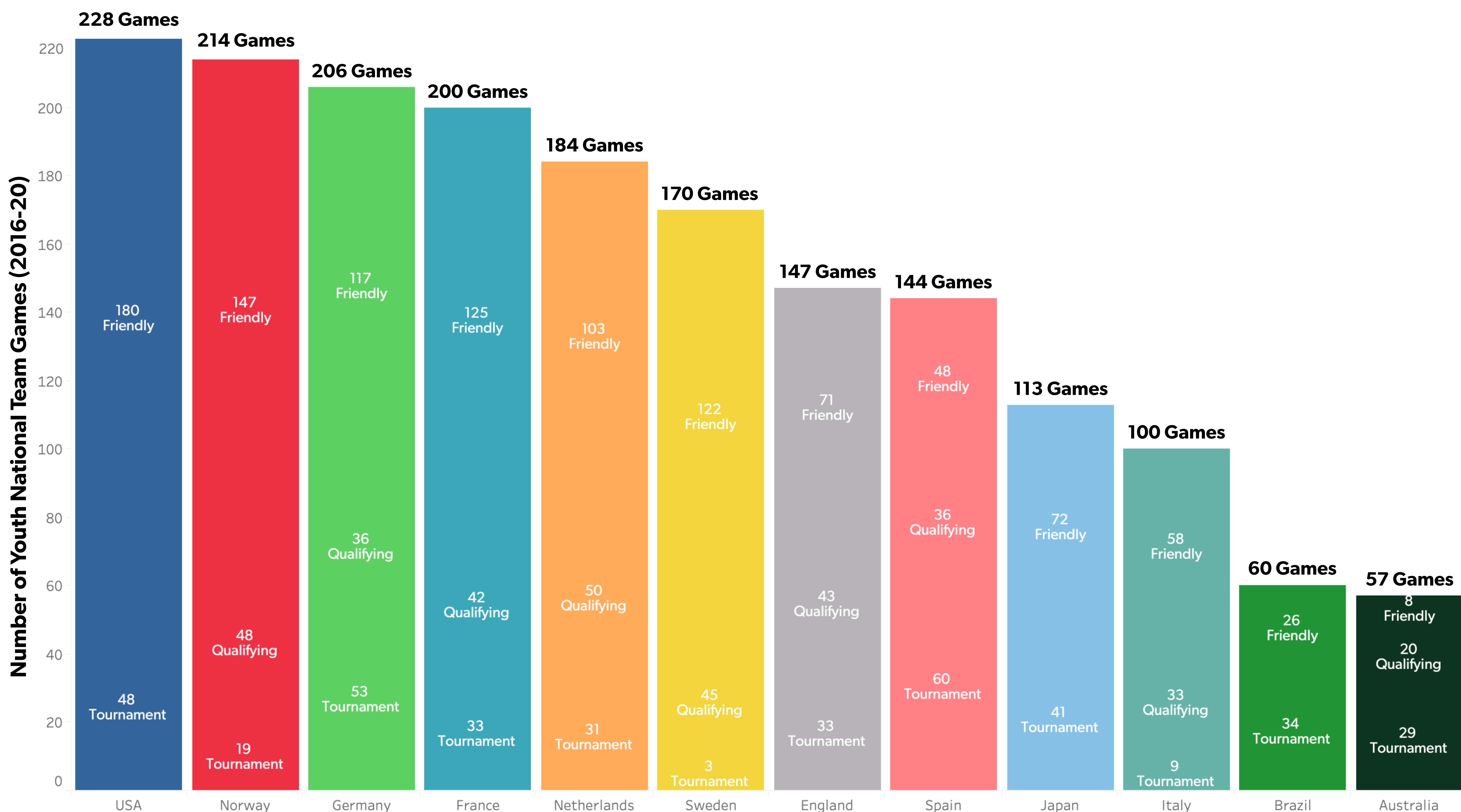
The vast majority of Australia's Youth National games have consisted of AFC Qualifying Games, AFF Tournament and AFC Tournament games. This type activity has led to a huge variance in the quality of games played. **Over half (55%) of Australia's Youth National Team wins have been by a margin of five or more goals.** In 38% of Australia's Youth National Team wins, Australia has hit double digits on the scoreboard.

However, when facing top tier AFC opponents — Japan, DPR Korea, China and Korea Republic — Australia has won once and drawn once from 12 meetings, scoring eight goals and conceding 49.

Also notable when comparing Australia's Youth National Team activity to the other Case Study Nations is the amount of Friendly games played. In just over four years, Australia's Youth National Teams have played just eight friendly games. By contrast, Norway's Youth National Teams have played 147 friendly games. **The average number of friendly games of the other Case Study Nations is 94, almost double the total number of games, of any kind, Australia has played in the same time period.**

During the time period analysed, Australia didn't play a single youth international game against UEFA or CONMEBOL opposition.

The huge variance in level of opposition, coupled with Australia's lack of friendly games, has made the challenge of qualifying for Youth World Cups even greater. This in turn robs Australia's youngsters of more top-level youth international experience.



Graph 1: How many Youth National Team activity each Case Study Nations plays.

NOTE: Youth National Team activity was calculated via fixture information published on each countries' Federation website.

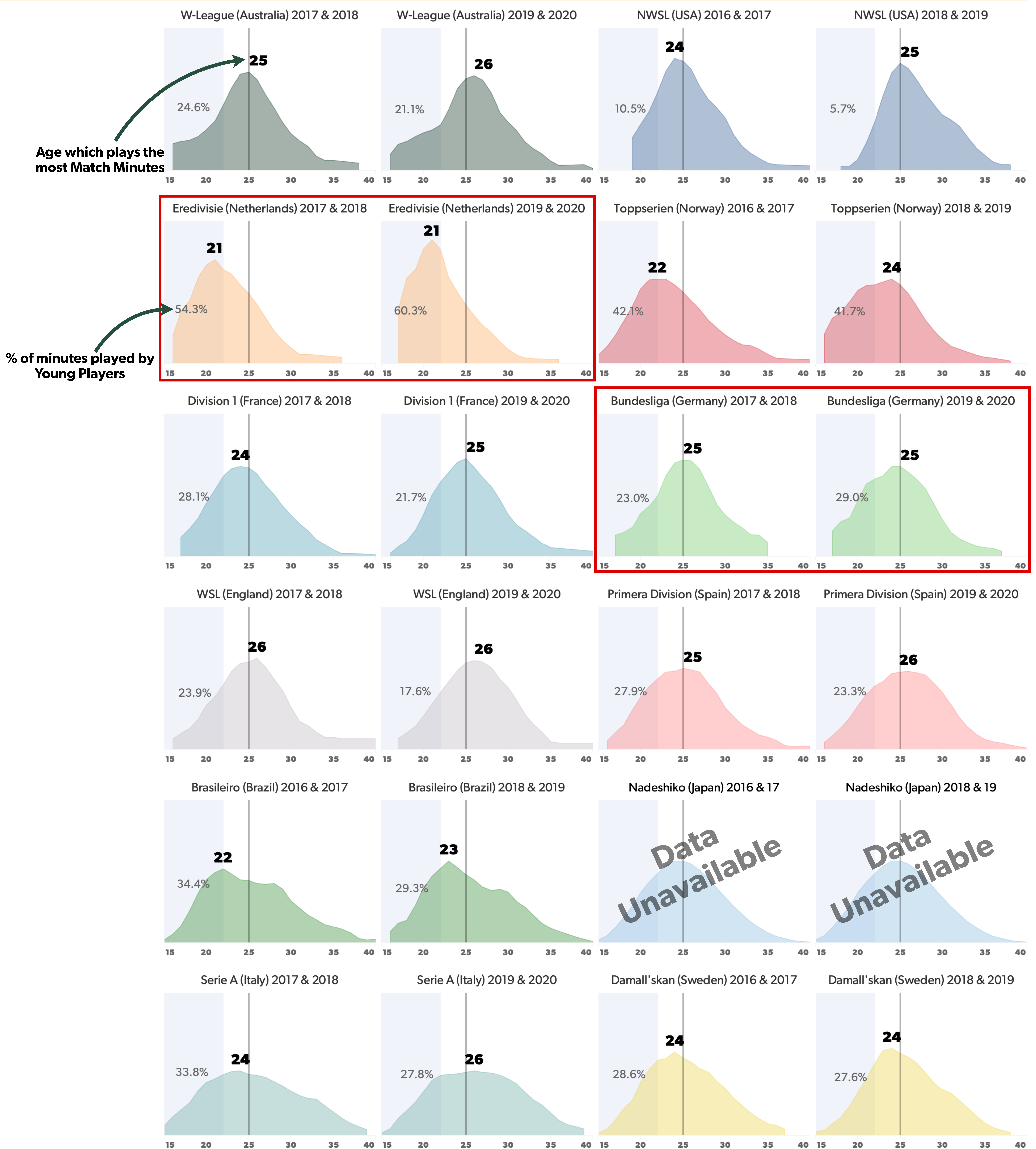
Match Classifications:

- **Qualifying:** UEFA European Championship Qualifiers or AFC Championship Qualifiers
- **Tournament:** Confederation Championships (Final Tournament) or FIFA Youth World Cups
- **Friendly:** International Friendlies, including UEFA Development Groups, Nordic Cup etc.

SENIOR DOMESTIC FOOTBALL



LEAGUE AGE DISTRIBUTIONS



As outlined in the 'Evolution of the Women's Game' Report, there is a two-fold global trend with Age Distributions:

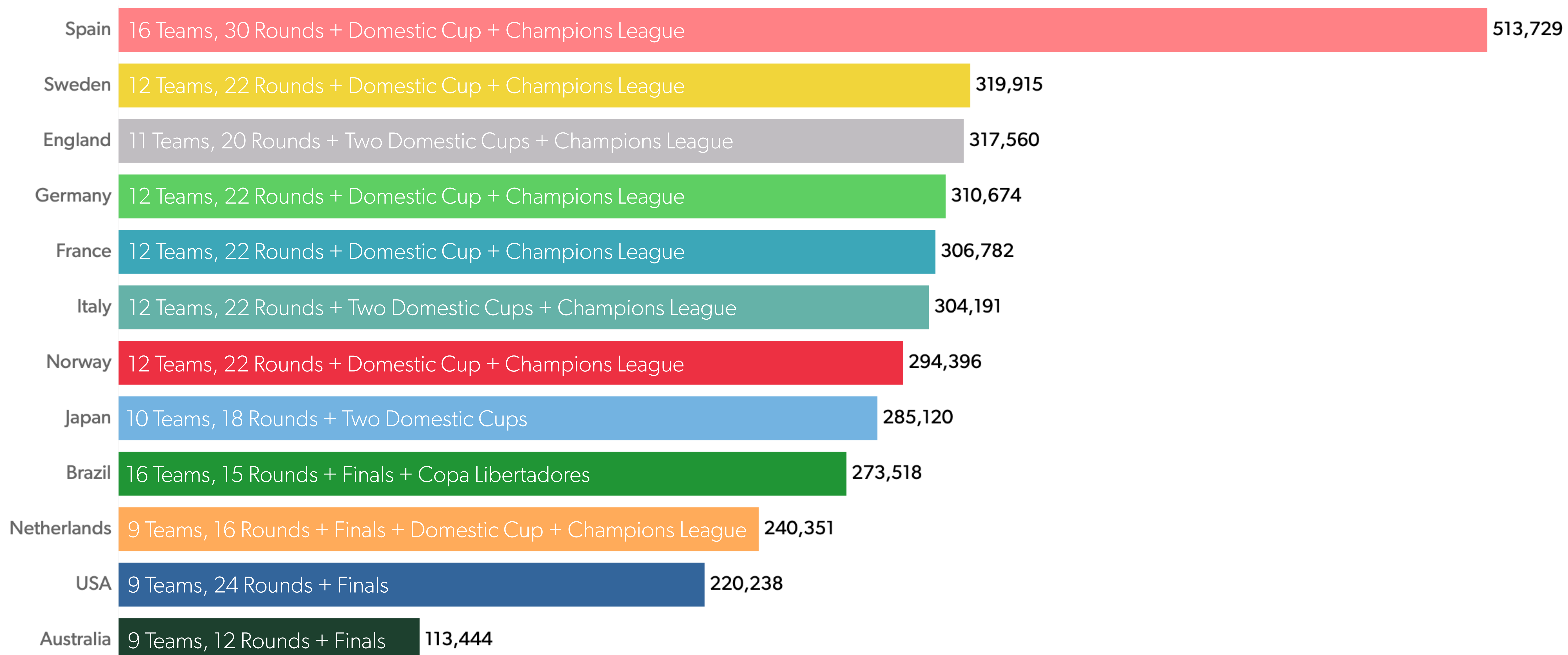
- 1) The most frequently used age is getting older. The most used age has increased in seven of the 11 Leagues.
- 2) There are fewer opportunities for Young Players to play. Only Netherlands' Eredivisie and Germany's Frauen-Bundesliga have seen more opportunities to play for Young Players in the last four seasons.

The Domestic leagues analysed are primarily geared towards Peak Performance ages, and the evolution seen over the last four seasons is in line with improvements in professional and remuneration standards. This allows a larger number of players to extend and prolong their careers as footballers.

Australia's W-League Age Distribution is in-line with the global trends.

DOMESTIC LEAGUE STRUCTURE

Top Level Minutes Played — 2018-19 Season



Graph 1: Total match minutes played by players in 1st Division teams in 2018-19 — Domestic League, Domestic Cup & Confederation Cup Competitions

Spain's Primera Division — with 16 teams and a 30 round league season — provides the most opportunities for players to play match minutes at a top level. The Primera Division comes in fourth in UEFA's League Co-Efficient Rankings — behind France's Division 1 (1st), Germany's Frauen-Bundesliga (2nd) and England's Women's Super League (3rd).

Players in top flight Spanish clubs also have the opportunity to earn minutes in the Copa de la Reina (Spain's National Cup).

A player in a top flight club in Spain has the opportunity to play three times as many top level games as a W-League player.

In total, nine of the 12 Case Study Leagues run National Cup competitions, while England and Japan also have extensive League Cup competitions and Italy has an annual Super Cup (for winners of the League and National Cup).

When it comes to Finals Series, four of the 12 leagues operate a post-Regular season tournament.

Australia and the USA have a two-game Finals Series — a semi final and a grand final. Brazil's Finals Series is played between the top eight teams and consists of two-legged quarter finals, semi finals and a two-legged grand final.

In Netherlands, the top and bottom halves of the Regular Season table split off into two 'mini leagues' where each team plays an additional round of home and away fixtures against their nearest ranked rivals.

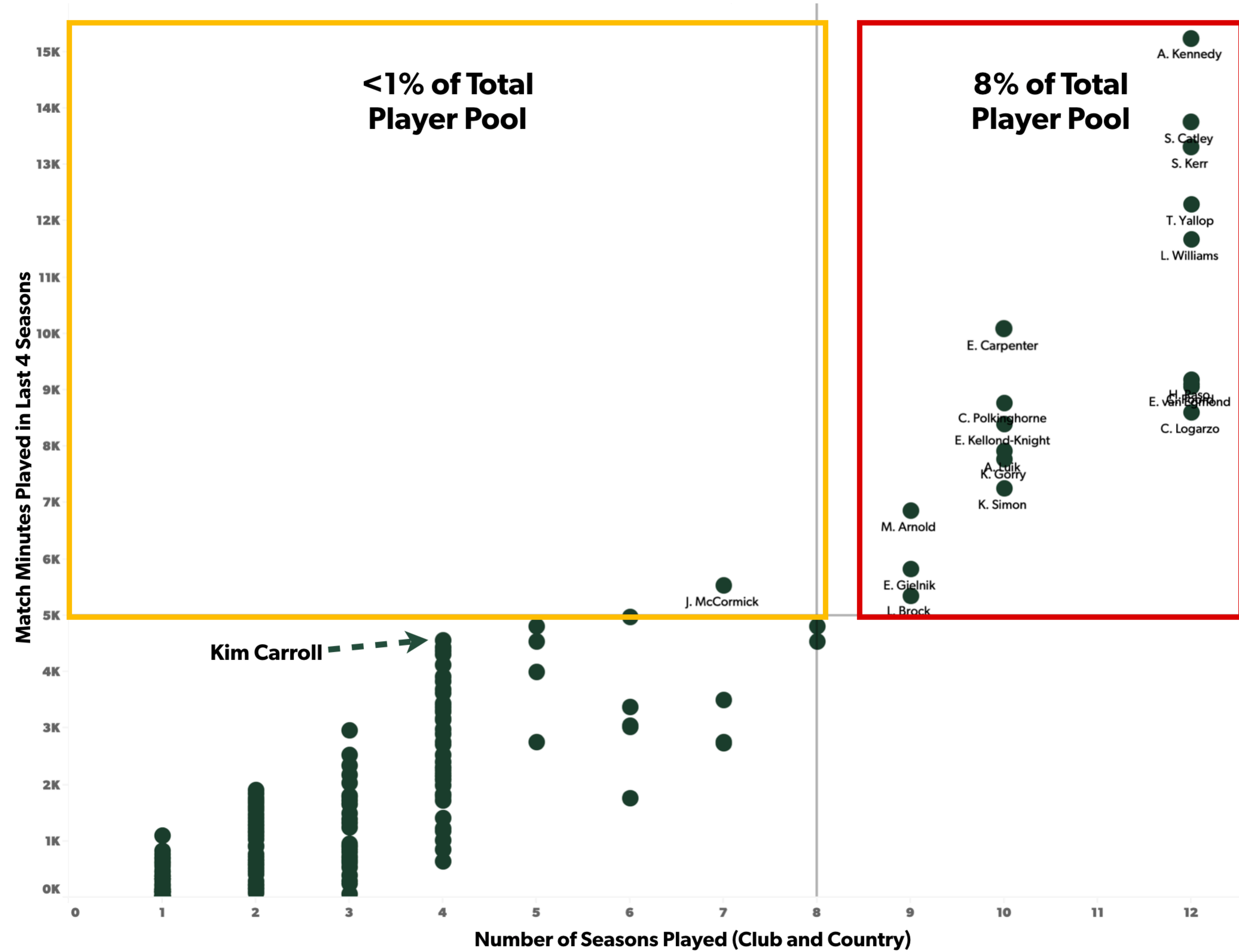
Australia's domestic league structure — with a maximum of 14 games on offer — allows for just 113,444 match minutes, compared to the Case Study League average of 291,660 minutes.

DOMESTIC COMPETITIONS	AUS	BRA	ENG	FRA	GER	ITA	JPN	NED	NOR	ESP	SWE	USA
REGULAR SEASON	12	15	20	22	22	22	18	16	22	30	22	24
FINALS SEASON	2	6	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	-	-	2
NATIONAL CUP	-	-	5	5	5	6	5	4	5	4	6	-
CUP (OTHER)	-	-	8	-	-	1	10	-	-	-	-	-
CONFEDERATION CUP	-	6	8	9	8	4	-	7	6	9	6	-
MAX. NUMBER OF GAMES AVAILABLE	14	27	41	36	35	33	33	35	33	43	34	26

Graph 2: Maximum number of games played by 1st Division teams in 2018-19 — Domestic League, Cup & Confederation Cup Competitions

AUSTRALIANS PLAYING ABROAD

Australian Players



The lack of match minutes on offer in Australia's W-League has consistently required players in, or on the fringe of the National Team to play abroad season-on-season.

The maximum minutes played by an Australian who only played in the W-League was 4,552 (Perth Glory's Kim Carroll).

By contrast, 21-year-old Spaniard Cinta del Mar Rodriguez played 8,569 minutes for club Sporting de Huelva in four seasons.

An Australian in the W-League would need to play every single minute of eight full Regular Seasons to surpass this figure.

This inability to regularly and consistently play top level match minutes has led to an alarming gap between Australia's National Team players and the rest. This gap is now insurmountable without strategic reform.

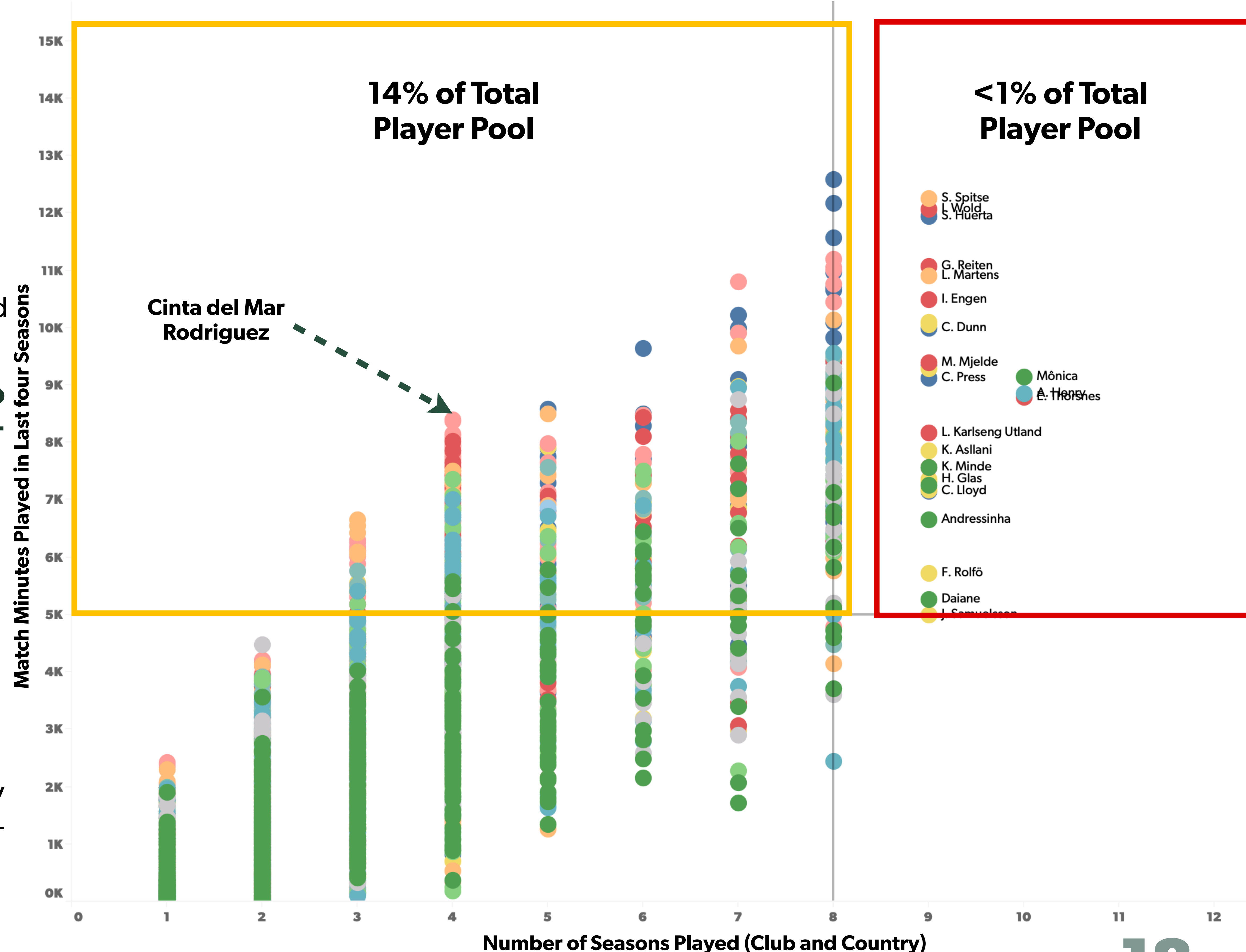
While only one Australian — Jenna McCormick — sits in the yellow quadrant, there were 539 players from other Case Study Nations.

Meanwhile, 18 Australians sit in the red quadrant — meaning they required more than nine unique seasons to surpass the 5,000 match minute marker. Half of these 18 players achieved this as a result of 12 unique seasons: four in the W-League, four in Overseas leagues and four with the National Team.

This — the constant change of club environments, and lack of pre/off-season — was cited as the number one factor behind Australian players' decision to go to Europe.

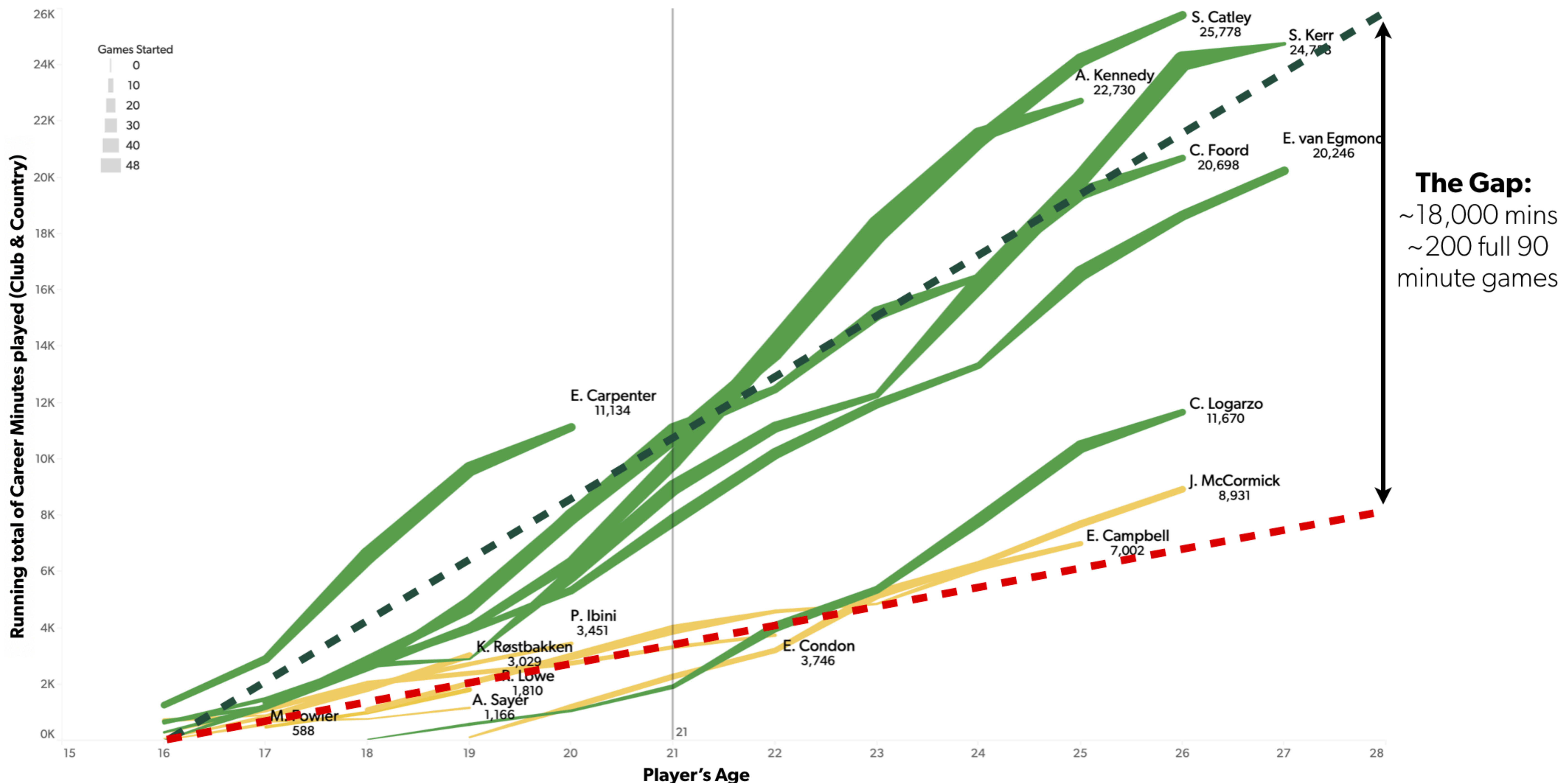
This decision to go to Europe has also led to players such as Emma Checker, Isobel Dalton, Beattie Goad, Ella Mastrantonio, Teagan Micah, Nikola Orgill, Indiah-Paige Riley and Karly Roestbakken all joining European clubs in Case Study Leagues — allowing them to play full-time, year-round in professional environments.

Players from other Case Study Nations



AUSTRALIANS PLAYING ABROAD

Career Match Minutes: Core Matildas to Debutants



There is a growing gap between Australia's Core National Team players — those able to earn a full time, year-round living and starting 35+ games every year in the best competitions in the world — and those trying to break into the National Team.

As previously outlined on Page 10 (Graph 2), Australia's Core National Team players are playing more than four times the amount of top level football when compared to those who have debuted for the Matildas since 2017.

The 'Gap' between Core players and Debutants begins early, as illustrated by the above chart tracking the Running Total of Match Minutes as each Core and Debutant player progresses through their career.

By 21, Core National Team players had accumulated on average over 10,000 match minutes for club and country.

Debutants, by contrast, are on track to have accumulated an average of just over 3,000 minutes by 21.

This difference is in part due to the evolving context of elite women's football globally. As outlined in the Evolution of the Women's Game report, increased investment, remuneration and professional standards has seen:

- Women's International Football is now geared towards Peak Performance ages. In 2007, the Most Used Age at the World Cup was 22. In 2019, this had increased to 27
- The Age Distribution of the W-League age, with the Most Used Age going from 21 to 25 in the last decade
- W-League match minutes played by 'Young' players has fallen from 60% to 22% in the last decade
- The Age Distribution of overseas leagues has also aged

All of these factors have made it more difficult for Young Australians, who are also getting fewer opportunities in the W-League and with Youth and Senior National Teams, to sign for overseas clubs. This in turn restricts their ability to play professional football year-round, and develop further, while at the same time a small minority of Senior National Team players are moving further and further ahead.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR U21 PLAYERS

>2,160 Match Minutes before 21 years old

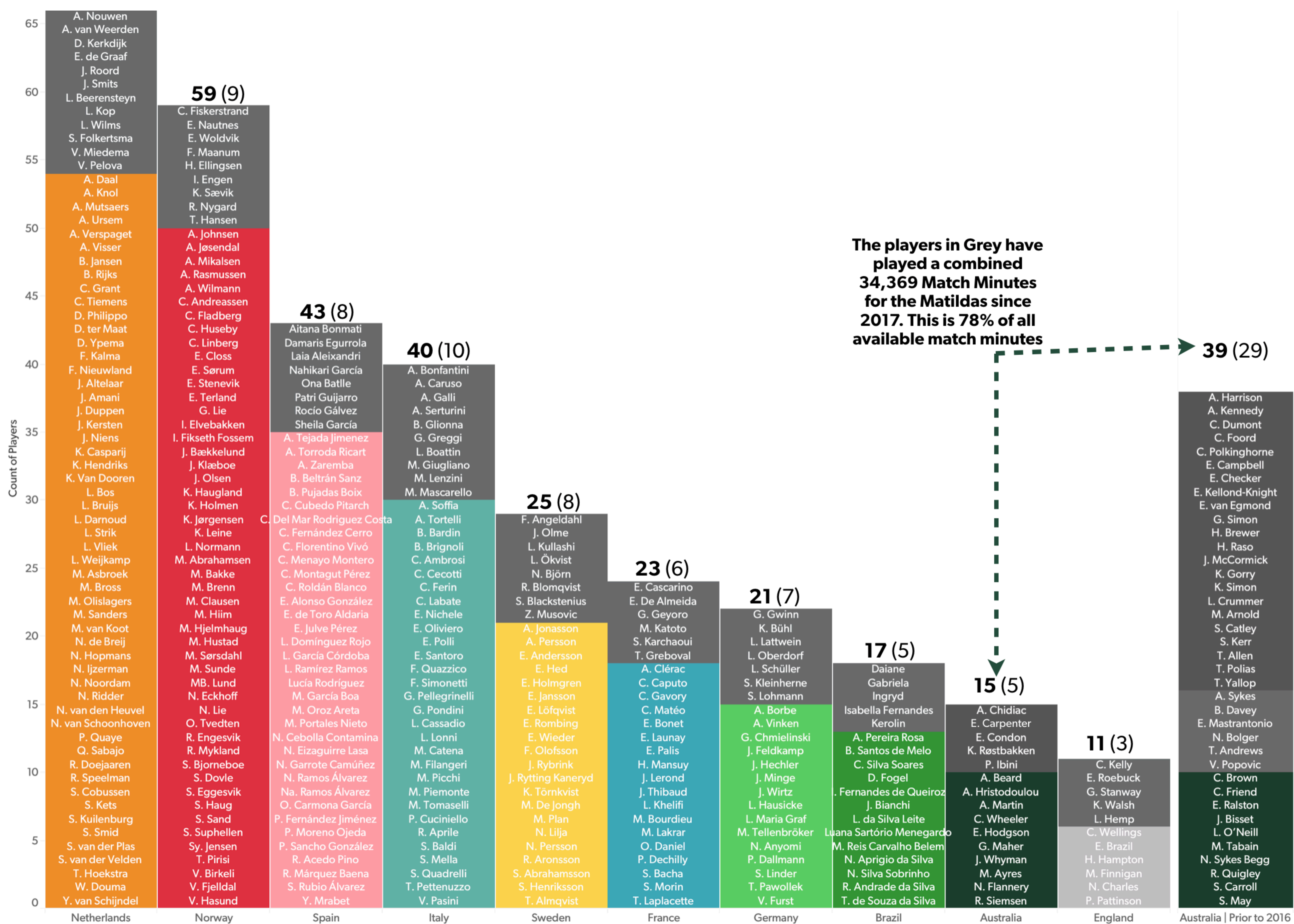
When calculating opportunities for 'Young' players to play regularly in domestic leagues, we have analysed the number of players to have surpassed 2,160 match minutes before they hit 21. The 2,160 minute mark represents playing two full W-League seasons.

In the four year period analysed, the W-League has seen 14 players hit this mark. Five of these players have played for the National Team — Alex Chidiac, Ellie Carpenter, Emily Condon, Karly Roestbakken and Princess Ibini.

Only England has fewer Young players to hit this benchmark — just 11 — while Netherlands lead the way, with 66 players hitting this benchmark in the last four seasons.

Prior to 2016, the W-League saw 38 Young Players achieve this 2,160 minute benchmark. Remarkably, nearly three quarters of these (28 of the 38, 74%) have represented the Matildas. This showcases the important role the early seasons of the W-League played in giving young Australian players the opportunity to gain senior domestic experience, and make their way into the National Team. The majority of these Aussie players — 58% also went overseas to ply their trade in top leagues.

It has since become more difficult for young Australians to break in and play regular W-League minutes, contributing to a lower proportion of player then being able to go overseas in top leagues — three of the 15 (20%; Chidiac, Carpenter, Roestbakken).



Graph 1: Players who have played >2,160 match minutes by 21 years old in the last four years. Players in Grey have represented their senior National Team.

NOTE: Japan Nadeshiko league data unavailable. USA's NCAA College league is outside the scope of this report.

