

HERE COMES THE FUTURE

AUSTRALIAN
PROFESSIONAL
LEAGUES REPORT
2020-2022:

OUR FIRST
TWO YEARS

APL



APL IN NUMBERS

GROWING THE FOOTBALL AUDIENCE

6.5M

Number of people who watched A-Leagues games in 2022

4.1M

Total community size of A-Leagues on social media in November 2022, a 12% increase from the previous year

32%

Growth in average match attendance in first six rounds of 2022/23 Isuzu UTE A-League Men compared to first six rounds of last season

\$425M

Valuation of APL at the time of Silver Lake investment in November 2021

BOOSTING FOOTBALL FINANCES

\$7M

Distribution to Football Australia from the APL Capital Raise

AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL LEAGUES (APL) ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THE LANDS WHERE WE LIVE, WORK AND PLAY, AND PAY OUR RESPECTS TO ELDERS PAST AND PRESENT.

CONTRIBUTING TO INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS

100%

Matildas who were developed in the Liberty A-League Women

65%

Proportion of the Socceroos' 2022 FIFA World Cup squad who are Isuzu UTE A-League youth products

31%

Proportion of the Socceroos' 2022 FIFA World Cup squad who currently play in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men, beating the 2014 record

EXPANDING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

1980

Total regular season minutes in the 2023/24 season, bringing the competition in line with global benchmarks set by the top-flight womens' leagues in England, America and France

99

Number of Liberty A-League Women's regular season games to be shown live and free on 10 Play in the 2022/23 season

144%

Increase in the number of games played in each season after the Liberty A-League Women expansion and move to a full home-and-away schedule is complete in 2023/24



“
**THE TRANSFORMATION
IN THAT TIME HAS BEEN
NOTHING SHORT OF
EXTRAORDINARY.** PAUL LEDERER
”

Two years ago, we embarked upon an exciting new journey when the Australian Professional Leagues (APL) was given full control of the top-flight men's and women's football leagues.

The transformation in that time has been nothing short of extraordinary, despite three seasons of unprecedented disruption. It is testament to the foundational strength and quality of APL leadership that the Australian professional game has emerged stronger than ever before.

We did not rest for a second during that period. Instead, we accelerated investment in strategic projects - creating an inclusive brand, expanding the Liberty A-League Women by three teams - and brought in new equity investment from Silver Lake, who are global leaders in technology investing, to support our long-term development strategy. We addressed the core elements of our leagues too - a new, long-term collective bargaining agreement

to embed gender equity in high performance in our competitions along with a new broadcast partner in Paramount ANZ.

We created KEEPUP, the transformational media arm of the APL, to serve the Australian and New Zealand football community by creating a single home of football content, and in the future football consumer utility and service, for our region.

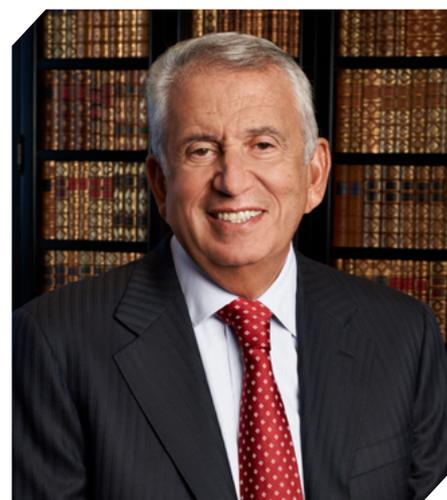
The 'unbundling' puts the A-Leagues in line with global best practice for football governance, and will continue to benefit the entire football pyramid for the long term. Throughout the COVID pandemic APL clubs played their part in supporting the Australian game financially and structurally. More than \$25million was directly provided by APL to Football Australia during the period of unbundling giving Football Australia financial surety in the most testing of times.

In a 12-month period that will see two FIFA World Cups, we are proud to say that 65% of the men's World Cup squad were developed in A-Leagues academies, and 100% of Matildas have played in the A-League Women. As part of our mission to unite, entertain and grow the game, it is vital that we continue to produce players for our national teams, to ensure that our clubs are competitive in Asia, and to support players' journeys both in the A-Leagues and in the world's best leagues.

In the years ahead, we are confident that our work will continue to deliver critical benefits to football at all levels of the Australian game. The simple truth is that APL's future is symbiotic with the rest of the Australian game, meaning we are invested, literally and metaphorically in the success of all of Australian football.

PAUL LEDERER

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



Since the APL assumed its new role at the end of 2020, we have made great strides in our work to make football the most watchable and entertaining sport in Australia. Our aim is twofold: we want to drive up levels of quality and professionalism across the A-Leagues, developing talent which will in turn support our national teams and beyond. And we want to grow our clubs' fan bases and increase fan engagement with their clubs and the A-Leagues' competitions.

Our plans to reinvent and reinvigorate top-flight football in Australia would be ambitious in any circumstances. Coming in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that we also had to face urgent short-term practical challenges simply to complete the 2021/22 season, which we did successfully despite rearranging 50% of the 200+ matches.

The scale of the APL's ambitions is exemplified by the investment that we negotiated with Silver Lake, global leaders in media, sport, entertainment and technology investing, in December 2021. Their significant minority stake will help us to drive technological enhancements

and innovations that will improve the fan experience, as well as developing the game further in Australia and New Zealand. Such an investment could not have happened prior to the 'unbundling' in December 2020, and the benefit is felt widely, both as a result of the \$7million distributed from the investment to Football Australia and from the growth of the game enabled by Silver Lake's investment.

The creation of KEEPU, the digital media arm of APL, was an important and innovative step forward for football in Australia and New Zealand. One third of Australians say they are football fans, if not yet A-Leagues fans. We now have a single home for world-class football content to serve all fans of football in the region whilst connecting them to the local game, and we continue to develop our original content arm, KEEPU Studios. And in the future, its utility and services will expand as we continue to expand the opportunities to connect with the broader football economy at all levels.

Our clubs' investment in young players through their academies provides a talent base that benefits

the entire football pyramid: many of the young players nurtured by our clubs will remain in the A-Leagues, while others will have successful professional careers in overseas leagues or continued participation in National Premier League (NPL) – the latter bringing new revenues into the game. Our investment in talent also feeds into the health of the national teams: the overwhelming majority of players in the Socceroos and Matildas have come through the A-Leagues. And it supports the health of the game at grassroots level, which is booming as never before. We plan to do more to support and inspire the millions who play every weekend with an expanding range of opportunities for people to connect with the world's game here in Australia and New Zealand.

We are confident that our plans will have a growing positive effect on football at all levels in the years ahead, and we are very excited by our future potential. This is just the start, there is much more still to come.

DANNY TOWNSEND

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO





“
WE WANT TO DRIVE UP LEVELS OF QUALITY AND PROFESSIONALISM ACROSS THE A-LEAGUES, DEVELOPING TALENT WHICH WILL IN TURN SUPPORT OUR NATIONAL TEAMS AND BEYOND. AND WE WANT TO GROW OUR CLUBS' FAN BASES AND INCREASE FAN ENGAGEMENT WITH THEIR CLUBS AND THE A-LEAGUES' COMPETITIONS. DANNY TOWNSEND

”

CHAPTER ONE

A NEW CHAPTER FOR THE A-LEAGUES





1.1

WE TOOK FULL CONTROL OF THE TOP-FLIGHT MEN'S AND WOMEN'S FOOTBALL LEAGUES

The creation of Australian Professional Leagues (APL) in December 2020 was an historic moment for top-flight football in our country. This “unbundling” meant that we were following global best practice in football, separating the operation of the top professional leagues from the regulatory body, Football Australia.

For the A-Leagues, it means we can invest in the top tier of Australian and New Zealand football like never before, And we can focus on the fan experience – attracting new fans and deepening their connection to the game. Put simply, A-League football matches will become more entertaining and higher quality, we will attract more fans, and this will boost revenues, allowing us to invest further.

A rising tide lifts all boats. Investment in our best players will directly benefit the Socceroos and Matildas, and their youth equivalents, helping our national teams reach new heights. And it will flow all the way through the National Premier Leagues, boosting player movement between the A-Leagues and NPL clubs, and spreading widely the benefits of the A-Leagues clubs’ investments in youth talent.

With the freedom to focus single-mindedly on the A-Leagues – on our fans, on marketing, and commercial development, and on our game our vision is to make Australian football the most entertaining and popular sport by 2030.

“
IT'S A PHENOMENAL PATHWAY FOR A PLAYER THAT GOES TO THE NATIONAL TEAM.

TONY GUSTAVSSON, HEAD COACH FOR THE MATILDAS, NOVEMBER 2022

”

31%

Proportion of the Socceroos' 2022 FIFA World Cup squad who play in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men, beating the 2014 record (8 players out of the 26-man squad).

100%

Proportion of the Matildas' squads over 2021/22 who have played in the Liberty A-League Women (44 players out of 44).

65%

Proportion of the Socceroos' 2022 FIFA World Cup squad who are Isuzu UTE A-League youth products (17 players out of the 26-man squad).

1.2

WE BROUGHT IN SIGNIFICANT NEW INVESTMENT TO DEVELOP THE FAN EXPERIENCE AND BOOST THE GAME

We marked our first anniversary since being given control of the leagues by announcing a major new investment in the A-Leagues, sending an important signal of our intent.

In December 2021, Silver Lake, a global leader in technology investing, took a 33.3% equity share in the APL in a transaction that valued the organisation at approximately AUD \$425 million (USD \$300 million) at the time of the investment.

This investment will support APL's long-term growth strategy for the leagues, with a measured deployment of capital over the coming years. Funds will support a variety of enhancements to enhance the core product and drive fan engagement – as detailed in the following sections of this report – including the A-Leagues rebrand, ongoing marketing, extensions of the Liberty

A-League Women competitions, and investment in marquee players.

A particular focus of the investment is support for our digital-first strategy, at the heart of which is the launch and development of our new KEEPUP digital platform. It is a huge challenge for any new digital platform to build from scratch, and then retain, a significant and loyal user base, and Silver Lake's investment will be crucial in helping us meet our goals for the new platform. That in turn will help us to deliver our broader objectives to boost football in Australia and New Zealand.

Beyond the Silver Lake deal, we have also agreed multi-year partnerships with Isuzu UTE Australia and Liberty Financial, which include naming rights for the men's and women's competitions respectively.

1.3

WE ESTABLISHED CLEAR FOUNDATIONAL VALUES TO DRIVE HIGH PERFORMANCE AND PROMOTE GENDER EQUITY

Just as important as what we do in the years ahead is how we do it. From the outset, we identified two foundational values that should inform everything that we do.

The first of these is to drive high performance standards in our sport. We want people to associate the A-Leagues with entertaining, exciting and quality football.

We want our best players to excel when they play week in, week out for their local teams. And when they turn out for our national teams, they should give us all something to be proud of and showcase the best Australasian talent to the world.

Second, we want these high performance standards, and everything that we do, to apply

equitably to the men's and women's leagues. We fundamentally believe in gender equity as a matter of principle. But it also makes commercial sense – why forego half of your potential fan base and half of the potential footballing talent in the country?

In a professional sport that has historically been dominated by the men's game, and in which investment levels have historically been suboptimal, a lot of work is required to fully embed these values in our operations. This report sets out some substantive early initiatives – from the rebranding of the leagues to the new collective bargaining agreement to creating a new digital platform for men's and women's football – that, we believe, demonstrate our core values.



1.4

WE REBRANDED THE MAIN COMPETITIONS TO A-LEAGUES

A year ago, ahead of the 2021/22 season, we aligned our main men's, women's and youth leagues – what were then the A-League, W-League and Y-League – under the unified banner of the A-Leagues.

This is more than a simple rebranding exercise. It puts down a marker about how top-flight football will be run in the future and is a major first step in our commitment to gender equity.

In a global first, we also launched the 'Club Championship', combining the points of the men's and women's leagues to crown the best performing club rather than team in Australia and New Zealand, creating better connectivity between the men's and women's teams.

As APL CEO Danny Townsend said at the time, "The APL is all about

football. It's not men's football or women's football, it's just football."

Danny added that "it's about time football took a leadership role in this space", and indeed our announcement was widely reported around the world and triggered a global conversation on the importance of how men's and women's sports were presented alongside one another.

The rebranding followed a period of consultation with players, coaches and fans. Sydney FC and former Young Matildas defender Ally Green hailed the decision as the biggest change to hit the women's competition since its inception in 2008, while Melbourne City and Socceroos striker Jamie Maclaren said, "For all of us to say we're under one umbrella is a proud moment."

1.5

WE AGREED A MAJOR NEW BROADCAST DEAL TO ENSURE FANS COULD WATCH MORE GAMES THAN EVER BEFORE

Our landmark media partnership deal with Paramount ANZ brings more live top-flight football to Australian audiences than ever before.

This comprehensive deal covered free-to-air TV and free and subscription streaming rights across Isuzu UTE A-League Men and Liberty A-League Women, running for five years from the 2021/22 season.

With coverage across Paramount ANZ's portfolio of TV and streaming services (both free-to-view and subscription), the new deal gives the game unprecedented reach and the backing of one of the largest broadcasting groups in the world, which can cross-promote its coverage across multiple channels and services.

In the 2021/22 season, one live match per round from each of Isuzu UTE A-League Men and Liberty A-League Women was televised each week on the free-to-air 10 Bold channel

and simulcast on the 10 Play streaming service. For both leagues, every single game in each round was available to stream on the Paramount+ subscription service.

Indicating the success of the new deal, average free-to-air viewing per A-Leagues game rose by 22% compared with the previous year in the former deal with ABC.

The free-to-view packages were rejigged in 2022/23 to boost access to both A-League Men and Women. Free-to-view coverage of Isuzu UTE A-League Men was doubled to two games per round, in regular Saturday night and Sunday 3pm slots, on 10 Bold and 10 Play. While for Liberty A-League Women, for the first time, every single game in each round has been made available to stream for free on 10 Play as well as continuing on Paramount+.

“

IT'S NOT MEN'S FOOTBALL OR WOMEN'S FOOTBALL, IT'S JUST FOOTBALL. DANNY TOWNSEND

”



6.5M

Number of people who watched A-Leagues games in 2022

56

Number of Isuzu UTE A-League Men's games to be shown live on free TV in the 2022/23 season, 81% more than under the previous TV deal

2.2%

Increase in average free-to-air viewership for 2021/22 Isuzu UTE A-League Men's live games since the change in broadcaster from ABC to Channel 10

#1

Paramount+ is the fastest growing streaming service in Australia

99

Number of Liberty A-League Women's regular season games to be shown live and free on 10 Play in the 2022/23 season



CHAPTER TWO

FANS





2.1

WE EMBARKED ON AN AMBITIOUS NEW STRATEGY TO REBUILD AUDIENCES POST-COVID – AND THEN TO TAKE THE FANBASE TO NEW LEVELS IN TERMS OF SIZE AND ENGAGEMENT

Football is the most popular sport in the world, and there is huge potential to grow the game in Australia and New Zealand. Our vision is to establish Australasian football as the most entertaining and popular sport in the country by 2030.

Our ambitious new strategy has three interlinked aims:

1. Rebuild the fan experience in the A-Leagues, growing match attendances (which, like all sports, suffered during COVID-19) and TV viewing
2. Increase the A-Leagues' fan base, with our new KEEPUP digital platform as the new online home of football in Australia and New Zealand
3. Help our clubs to connect with their fans, by pooling our resources and coordinating efforts to maximise the A-Leagues' commercial potential.

We will be highly innovative in our use of data and technology. Our plans for the new KEEPUP platform exemplify our modern approach to digital and social media as we create new ways for fans to connect with the game,

building a home of football for fans in Australia and New Zealand.

And we will exploit the untapped potential to bring together our individual clubs' fans – only with their permission of course – so we can communicate with them directly and offer them content on the A-Leagues and their football interests more broadly.

Alongside these longer-term strategic initiatives, we have also sought to make immediate improvements to our competitions. One example was our decision to expand the A-Leagues Finals Series in 2021/22, ensuring a more exciting climax to the season. In the Isuzu UTE A-League Men, we turned the semi-finals into two-legged fixtures – meaning two more games – while in the Liberty A-League Women we added an extra game, with the loser of the semi-final between the teams who finished in the top two in the regular season being granted a second chance to progress by playing the winner of the second semi-final. These new competition formats drove engagement levels.

32%

Growth in average match attendance in first six rounds of 2022/23 Isuzu UTE A-League Men compared to first six rounds of last season. Average attendance is back up to 98% of the 2018/19 pre-COVID-19 levels for those clubs in the league in both years

77%

Increase in social interactions (likes, comments, shares, etc) in first six rounds of 2021/22 season compared to the same period last season

2.7M

Video views across social channels in first six rounds of 2021/22 season, up 188% on same period last season, driven by A-Leagues All Access

4.1M

Total community size of A-Leagues on social media in November 2022, a 12% increase from the previous year

WE LAUNCHED OUR NEW DIGITAL PLATFORM, KEEPUP, AND ORIGINAL CONTENT ARM, KEEPUP STUDIOS, TO MAKE FOOTBALL MORE ACCESSIBLE AND EASIER TO CONNECT WITH

We believe that the best way to connect with football fans in the 2020s is by creating new and varied opportunities to connect with the game.

That is why we launched KEEPUP, our innovative new digital service. It is why we have invested significantly to date in developing and launching the platform. And it is why we have grown our in-house digital content team to 40 people, almost half of our total staff.

Our aim for KEEPUP is to become the deepest source of football-related content in Australia and New Zealand. We produce our own text and video content – with tens of thousands of unique pieces of Australasian football content already created, covering the A-Leagues and beyond. Reflecting our commitment to gender equity, content on men's and women's football is available in one place.

After launching successfully in the 2021/22 season, the focus for 2022/23 is to deepen the range of content on offer, giving fans new ways to connect with the game.

Our content has commercial value, and we work with partners to distribute it widely. That way, as many fans as possible get to see it, and we can build up a new revenue stream to reinvest in the sport.

KEEPUP attracted 2 million unique users in its first year, and have since reached 5.2 million. This is a first step, and we have big plans to enhance and add to the functionality of the platform over time, as we also complement the content offering with other football related services that create utility for fans.



426,000

Monthly active users of KEEPUP web, a 131% increase on last year's metric

5.2M

Users of KEEPUP digital platform in since launch

67%

Increase in KEEPUP users in its second year of operation, from November 21 to November 22

CASE STUDIES

A-LEAGUES ALL ACCESS

In October 2022, Australian Professional Leagues and KEEPUP launched A-Leagues All Access, a new weekly documentary series that provides exclusive access to teams, players and the league. The innovative format combines feature storytelling and match action, offering unprecedented access to both players' lives and to the change room action. The show is also distributed on 10 Bold, 10 Play and Paramount+.

DUB ZONE

In November 2022, we launched Dub Zone, an innovative new Saturday afternoon studio show that presents all the simultaneous Liberty A-League Women games, with goals and key moments shown and discussed as soon as they occur, alongside two-way conversation with fans and integrated features. Presented by Niav Owens and Briana Goodchild, along with social media commentator Kat Haddad, commentator Teo Pellizzeri, and a host of current and former players and coaches, the show offers a fresh and exciting presentation of the Liberty A-League Women's game every week on 10 Play and Facebook.

FANTASY AND TIPPING

KEEPUP also launched its Official A-Leagues Fantasy and Tipping platform this season, bringing fantasy football to the A-Leagues and offering weekly and end-of-season prizes. With competitions for both the men's and women's leagues, the APL are one of the only leagues to have current, standalone competitions for the men's and women's games.



WE REVIVED THE A-LEAGUES ALL STARS GAME, HOSTING A HIGH-PROFILE MATCH WITH BARCELONA THAT PROMOTED OUR BEST TALENT ALL OVER THE WORLD

In May 2022, FC Barcelona played their first game on Australian soil in a friendly match against the A-Leagues All Stars.

Our decision to revive the A-Leagues All Stars Game, last played in 2014, paid off handsomely. A huge crowd of more than 70,000 turned out at the Accor Stadium in Sydney, the biggest turnout for an event of any kind in Australia in the two years since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

They were treated to an exciting game in which an All-Stars team that featured some of our brightest young talents held their own against Barcelona, losing narrowly 3-2 to the visitors.

Amongst the young players showcased in the game, then-17-year-old Garang Kuol has since been called

up as part of Australia's squad for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, and has been signed by Premier League team Newcastle United from January 2023.

The match was shown for free on Network 10, reaching an audience of 366,000, and was also broadcast around the world. Our new digital platform KEEPUP had its busiest week to date in the run-up to the game, with almost 1 million users.

This initiative was a triumph. We succeeded in particular in our objective to promote the A-Leagues to football lovers in Australia and to generate interest globally. Just under 3,000 media stories covering the match across print, online, TV and radio generated a cumulative audience reach of over 40 million people.

40M

Global reach of stories covering the game on all media platforms

70,174

Attendance at Accor Stadium for A-Leagues All Stars vs Barcelona, the biggest event attendance in Australia to that point in the two years since the start of COVID-19

936,000

Users on KEEPUP in the week prior to the game, the busiest week to date for the new digital platform



WE MADE STRIDES IN MAKING OUR GAME SAFER AND MORE INCLUSIVE

The A-Leagues are built on a rich history of diversity and continue to represent the modern face of Australia and New Zealand. Everyone has the right to access football equally and without discrimination, and since unbundling we have implemented a number of strategies and initiatives to embed and improve diversity and inclusion in our game.

LGBTI+ INCLUSION

LGBTI+ inclusion is close to many of our players and fans' hearts. Many female players openly identify as LGBTI+ and last season Adelaide United player Josh Cavallo became the first active top-flight male professional footballer to come out as gay anywhere in the world. This created a huge amount of media interest globally, that has continued as Josh has become an active spokesperson for LGBTI+ issues.

In 2022, the A-Leagues marched alongside Football Australia in the Mardi Gras, with all 13 clubs represented in the iconic parade. In 2023, we will work with World Pride to represent the world's game. The 2021/22 season saw the first ever Pride Game hosted by Adelaide United as they took on Melbourne Victory's men's and women's teams. The game was reported as an outstanding success from a community engagement, LGBTI+ inclusion awareness and fan engagement point of view.

In 2023, the A-Leagues will hold a league-wide Pride celebration across the Liberty A-League Women and Isuzu UTE A-League Men, headlined by the Pride Cup match between Melbourne Victory and Adelaide United. The celebration will include LGBTI+ education training for all players, the roll out of national stadium safety and inclusion activities, and rainbow activations and celebrations across the league.

For the 2021/22 Isuzu UTE A-League Men Finals Series, the APL invested in a trial stadium safety and inclusion program with Melbourne Olympic Parks Trust, the operator of Melbourne's main sporting venues. Created in partnership with Pride Cup, the program focussed on reducing discrimination at match, offering specialised training for venue staff, enhanced reporting mechanisms and new stadium signage.

APL PARTNERSHIP WITH GOBUBBLE

The A-Leagues have partnered with AI Provider Go Bubble to shield the social media channels of all A-Leagues clubs and players from abusive, derogatory, harmful or offensive language. Hate speech is a growing and harmful online

issue, so this move, using the latest technology, puts safeguards in place to protect the wellbeing of A-Leagues footballers, as well as the community of managers who run the official club social media channels.

2023 POWERCHAIR WORLD CUP

A-Leagues are providing commercial and marketing support for the 2023 Powerchair World Cup, allowing the organisation to reduce its expenditure. The Powerchair World Cup is coming to Sydney in October 2023, and will bring the world's best powerchair

players down under. The A-Leagues' support of the event is part of our commitment to making football accessible to people of all abilities and providing representation of 'all abilities football' across the football and sporting community.

INDIGENOUS FOOTBALL WEEK 2022

A-Leagues partnered with the John Moriarty Football to help deliver Indigenous Football Week 2022 as the centrepiece of Round 4 of the Isuzu UTE A-League Men 2022/23 season. Representation of Indigenous communities in football is increasing, and A-Leagues are committed to ensuring that our game is culturally safe and inclusive at every level.

We have specific initiatives to support player pathways for First Nations women and men into the A-Leagues, including programs and activities that increase engagement and access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Indigenous Football Week will be an opportunity for us to rally A-Leagues fans and partners to donate to the John Moriarty Foundation to allow the organisation to continue to make a positive impact in Indigenous communities.

AFGHAN WOMEN'S NATIONAL TEAM

In August 2021, a group of 77 Afghan athletes and family members, including members of the Afghanistan women's national football team, youth team and women's football officials fled Kabul airport on a plane bound for Australia.

In early 2022, Melbourne Victory supported the Afghan Women's Team return to football by providing a bespoke, holistic and elite football program that supported their

ultimate goal, to once again return to international football as the FIFA recognised Afghanistan Women's National Team. The team also now competes in Football Victoria's Senior Women's competition where they are coached by Victory coach Jeff Hopkins.

The Club also supported their social and cultural life through investment in health and wellbeing, education and employment support.

40

Number of different nations represented in the Liberty A-League Women since 2008

51

Number of different nations represented in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men 2022/23

107

Number of different nations represented in the A-Leagues since its inception



CHAPTER THREE

FOOTBALL





3.1

WE SIGNED A FIVE-YEAR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT WITH PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLERS AUSTRALIA (PFA)

In September 2021, we announced an historic collective bargaining agreement with Professional Footballers Australia (PFA) that will drive playing standards across the A-Leagues.

The agreement is unprecedented in terms of its:

- **Duration**, running for five seasons;
- **Scope**, covering the men's and women's competitions;
- **Ambition**, detailing a broad range of areas to which high standards will apply; and
- **Commitment** to gender equity.

It is designed to create an attractive workplace for the nation's players and to give them economic security, whilst also providing certainty and stability for the clubs. As one indicator of its positive impact on player security and club stability, the PFA's A-League Men Report for 2021/22 shows a significant decline in player churn: the percentage of players coming off contract at the start of the 2021/22 season was the lowest recorded in eight seasons, falling to 48% from 68% in 2020/21, a drop of 20 percentage points in one year.

The agreement mandates minimum standards across the men's and women's competitions. These include

enhanced high performance standards with a base level of parity in training venues, staffing and player workloads, medical standards, travel and accommodation, covering details such as the quality of changing rooms, gyms and high performance recovery facilities.

It also ensures sustainable increases to minimum and maximum player payments for male and female players, along with guaranteed funding for player welfare and development programs and support for the PFA Past Players Program.

The agreement produced immediate and substantial benefits to the A-Leagues. In 2021/22, the first season for which it was in force, the minimum salary was increased by 26% and increased the salary cap by 11% in Liberty A-League Women in line with the extended season.

In the men's league, through a combination of the new agreement plus a recovery in player investment following the COVID-19-driven hit the year before, clubs invested \$52 million in player payments in 2021/22, a significant annual increase of almost \$14 million, (spend was \$38.1 million in 2020/21). And men's player payments will increase further this year, by an estimated \$5 million across the 2022/23 season.



WE BEGAN A THREE-YEAR PROCESS OF EXPANDING LIBERTY A-LEAGUE WOMEN BY A CLUB A YEAR, AND EXTENDING THE SEASON LENGTH TO 22 ROUNDS

In another clear example of gender equity driving our actions, in September 2021 we committed to expand the Liberty A-League Women's competition from nine clubs to 12 over a three-year period. For the first time, the league will then offer a full home-and-away schedule of 132 games – more than double the 54 games across the 2020/21 regular season.

This was the first expansion of the women's league since Melbourne City joined in 2015. The 33% increase is the result of our commitment to an accelerated investment in the competition ahead of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

Wellington Phoenix were the first of the new clubs to join the league, in the 2021-22 season, with Western

United following a year later. We are delighted that Football Australia have now given official approval for Central Coast Mariners to join in 2023-24.

The expanded schedule will be good for players and fans alike: more playing time will drive the quality of the games, and the increased number of matches will provide more opportunities for people to connect with the sport.

There will also be longer term benefits. The additional games will bring more revenue into the game. And they will make the league more competitive with women's football leagues in other countries that currently offer more playing time, helping us to retain the best Australian and New Zealand talent.

1980

Total regular season minutes in the 2023/24 season, bringing the competition in line with global benchmarks set by the top-flight women's leagues in England, America and France

33%

Expansion of Liberty A-League Women from nine clubs to 12 over a three-year period

144%

Increase in the number of games played in each season after the Liberty A-League Women expansion and move to a full home-and-away schedule is complete in 2023/24



3.3

WE COMMITTED TO A THREE-YEAR STRATEGY OF MARQUEE INVESTMENT, WITH THE SIGNING OF NANI AHEAD OF THE 2022-23 SEASON A SIGNAL OF OUR INTENT

As the A-Leagues seek to boost their profile in Australia, New Zealand, and around the world, we have identified the signing of marquee players as a key part of our accelerated growth strategy.

Our investment from Silver Lake enables us to support the signing by A-League clubs of globally-renowned talent who will help drive interest in our competitions, boost attendances and TV audiences, and support the domestic and international marketing of the A-League.

Our biggest marquee signing to date is Portuguese international, UEFA Champions League and four-time English Premier League winner Nani, who joined Melbourne Victory in July 2022 on a two-year contract.

The signing of these players are statements of our intent to attract and retain marquee talent through a sustained multi-season strategy. We have identified a list of 35 world-class players to target and will support further marquee signings in the near future.

As a further move to raise the calibre of players participating in Isuzu UTE A-League Men, we brought in a Designated Player Rule in 2021/22, which enabled each club to sign a prestige player outside the salary cap. As well as producing an uplift in player quality, this led to \$7.2 million of additional investment in playing talent. In 2022/23 we expanded the rule, allowing a second Designated Player in each club.



3.4

WE PUT YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AT THE HEART OF OUR FOOTBALL STRATEGY

One of our most important responsibilities is to build the best possible pathways for young players. That means both developing young talent, and then making sure talented individuals are given opportunities to graduate to the professional level and play first team football.

Since unbundling, we have strengthened the A-League's focus on young talent. Our landmark collective bargaining agreement with the PFA increases the cap on scholarship players, giving our clubs greater capacity to contract and invest in youth.

A-League clubs have spent more than \$45 million to date on youth development and have nearly doubled the number of scholarship players. Remarkably, nearly 50% of the contracted players in the men's competition were under 23 years old last season, with almost 150 Under-23 players featuring in the A-League Men's 2021/22 season.

Our focus on youth has already reaped benefits for our national teams. 14 of the Olyroos squad for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games were A-League Men players, while the vast majority

of players in the U17 boys youth national team – which reached the last 16 of the 2019 U17 FIFA World Cup – was a product of an A-League academy.

Demonstrating the importance of the Liberty A-League Women to development of Australia's best female footballers, of the 21 players selected for the 2022 FIFA U20 Women's World Cup, 20 are contracted to Liberty A-League Women clubs. Many of these squad members have been playing in the Liberty A-League Women since they were 16 or 17 years old.

And it has benefited the club game all the way through the football pyramid. We are benefiting from the lowest exodus of Australian players to other countries in many years, with some of our most promising young players, such as Daniel Arzani, returning home to play in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men.

The A-League clubs' investments in their academies is also beneficial to the National Premier Leagues, with 20 Isuzu UTE A-League Men players being signed by NPL clubs in the 2021/22 season.

CASE STUDY

CENTRAL COAST MARINERS ACADEMY

Despite the inconsistent pathways nationally for girls' development, some A-League Clubs have made significant investments. Central Coast Mariners, who will join the Liberty A-League Women in 2023/24, have one of the best known girls' academy systems in Australia. Their pathways begins with the Girls

Skills Acquisition Programme for U10, U11, U12 and U13 players, and these teams underpin the Central Coast Mariners FNSW League One (previously WNPL 2) programme, which in turn will support the Liberty A-League Women's programme from 2023. Famous graduates include Kyah Simon and Teresa Polias.



45%

Proportion of all contracted Isuzu UTE A-League Men players aged 23 and under in 2021/22

11

Number of players who joined the Isuzu UTE A-League Men in 2021/22

21

Number of players from the Isuzu UTE A-League Men who played in the NPL in 2021/22

25.0- 25.1

Average age of Isuzu UTE A-League Men players in each of last three seasons (2019/20 to 2021/22), down from 26.7-27.6 between 2012/13 and 2018/19

95%

Of the 21 players in the 2022 FIFA U20 Women's World Cup, 20 are contracted to Liberty A-League Women clubs

11.1%

Percentage of total match minutes in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men accounted for Under-21 players – the highest figure for any league in the Asian Football Confederation



3.5

WE OVERCAME THE MAJOR EXTERNAL CHALLENGES OF COVID-19 AND EXTREME FLOODING TO FINISH THE SEASON ON TIME

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the most severe and sustained disruptions ever experienced in the history of the A-Leagues. Alongside the long-term investment plans we were developing, we also had to meet these day-to-day challenges to keep the show on the road.

The 2020/21 season was characterised by state lockdowns and games being played behind closed doors. When fans were able to attend games, attendances were modest as the COVID-19 vaccination program rolled out gradually across the country. We developed tight protocols for the clubs to follow enabling matches to continue in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men and Liberty A-League Women.

As the world started to open up, everyone was hopeful that the worst was behind us at the start of the 2021/22 season. Instead, it turned out to be even more disrupted than

the season before, as the Omicron variant swept through Australia.

Repeated waves of COVID-19 outbreaks in player camps forced the mass postponement of fixtures. Making matters even worse, extreme flooding in New South Wales and Queensland led to further postponements of matches, further exacerbating the challenges.

Across the season, we were faced with the huge administrative task of rearranging as many as 113 men's and women's matches – exactly 50% of the total. And we had to do so whilst observing state border closures and constantly evolving restrictions to travel, events and vaccination requirements.

It was therefore a huge achievement that, for the second year running, the APL and its clubs in the men's and women's leagues succeeded in completing their seasons on time in the face of such adversity.

113

Number of games across the A-Leagues that had to be rearranged in the 2021/22 season

0

Number of days by which the end of the season was delayed, following the substantial efforts of the APL and its clubs to reschedule their games

ISUZU UTE LEAGUE
CHAMPIONS
2022



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2022

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