

MEDICAL POSITION STATEMENT ON

MINIMUM PLAYER WORKLOAD SAFEGUARDS

IN MEN'S PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL



12 CONSENSUS-BASED
PROTECTION STANDARDS FOR
COMPETITION REGULATIONS

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WELCOME



A ROADMAP FOR PRAGMATIC SOLUTIONS

The consensus findings presented in this position statement represent more than scientific recommendations—they constitute a roadmap for pragmatic solutions that can immediately protect the health and performance of professional footballers worldwide.

Developed through rigorous consultation with 70 independent medical and performance experts, these basic and minimum protections provide football's governing bodies and competition organizers with clear, evidence-based standards that remove any ambiguity about what players require to maintain their wellbeing in an increasingly demanding high-risk environment.

Regarding required minimum safeguards the question to the industry and decision-makers is not if but how can we best implement this from a sporting, governance and regulatory perspective. This scientific consensus aligns with positions that have been articulated and developed by FIFPRO over several years and supports ongoing discussions to integrate player safeguards within the IMC and competition design.

The clear focus on recovery periods, off-season breaks, and special protections for young players strengthen the existing foundation of required safeguards that should be incorporated into any future calendar reforms. The study's findings make clear that player welfare considerations are not simply preferences but scientifically established necessities for sustainable careers and optimal performance.



**PROF. DR. VINCENT
GOUTTEBARGE**
FIFPRO Medical
Director

// This study presents safety standards based on the considered and independent opinions of medical and performance experts working in professional football who understand the mental and physical strain placed on players.

**IF WE CAN ALL AGREE THAT HEALTH
COMES FIRST, THEN WE SHOULD TAKE STEPS
TO IMPLEMENT THESE SAFEGUARDS.**



DR. DARREN BURGESS
Chair of the FIFPRO
High-Performance
Advisory Network

// **DECODING THE HUMAN BODY, PERFORMANCE,
AND SPORT-RELATED INJURIES WILL BE
A LIFELONG SCIENTIFIC EXERCISE.**

The results show that there are certain minimum standards such as adequate rest between matches or proper off-season breaks that are common sense, aligned with scientific evidence and above all required by global occupational health and safety standards.

THE DELPHI PROCESS



ONGOING RESEARCH ON PLAYER WORKLOAD AND BASIC SAFEGUARDS

A recent FIFPRO commissioned report by the Belgian University Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven) says that the professional football sector is failing in its duty to apply required safety standards and, as a result, is violating existing legal frameworks at a European and global level.

The report looked at the holistic job demands and resources of the professional football sector, taking note of various stressors in a multifaceted and high-risk environment. Meanwhile, it examines football's legal obligations to apply health and safety standards to the sector.

In addition, the recent reformatting and expansion of international and national competitions, professional men footballers have been facing an increasing workload. Such a congested schedule dictated by the International Match Calendar (IMC) and different competitions increases the players' susceptibility to musculoskeletal injuries as research has shown for more than 15 years. Evenmore, surveys conducted over the 2018-2021 period have indicated that a significant percentage of professional footballers and staff members expressed their concerns about playing too many matches with inadequate recovery time, as well as about the negative impact of long-haul travel on recovery, performance and health.

Based on this scientific evidence, FIFPRO has articulated various recommendations related to men's professional football (e.g., number of matches, in- and off-season break). These recommendations aimed to prioritize player welfare and injury prevention, with a focus on scheduling considerations to allow adequate recovery time between matches, addressing the impact of travel on players, optimizing working conditions, and managing overall workload.

COLLABORATION WITH THE FIFPRO HIGH PERFORMANCE ADVISORY NETWORK

FIFPRO's High-Performance Advisory Network (HPAN) establishes a dedicated platform for elite performance coaches to drive discussion and provide expert feedback on priority topics including player workload and performance technology.

- The core function of this expert network is to deliver thought-leadership, inform player-centric policy development and enhance existing evidence-based research and expertise.
- Comprised of several expert practitioners operating in high-performance roles across elite sport. Members are spread regionally and based across the FIFPRO Divisions. All have extensive experience working in elite-level football.

In partnership with its High-Performance Advisory Network, FIFPRO initiated the validation of its recommendations according to a Delphi process. Such a scientific process enabled through three rounds of surveys the collection of knowledge among medical and performance experts in order to ultimately reach consensus about some of these recommendations and form FIFPRO's position statement.

The methodological approach of the Delphi process is further described in Annex 1, while the results of the three rounds of surveys are presented in Annex 2. The full scientific report has been submitted to a peer-review scientific journal and is pending publication (first author: Dr Steve den Hollander, FIFPRO Sports Science Consultant).

<https://fifpro.org/en/player-iq/high-performance-advisory-network>

The Delphi process, conducted in collaboration with FIFPRO's High-Performance Advisory Network, represents the most extensive expert consensus ever achieved on safeguards against excessive workload, with over 75% agreement required amongst participants to establish each recommendation*.

*This study and its methodology has been designed solely by the FIFPRO High Performance Advisory Network.

EXPERT PARTICIPANTS

A total of 70 performance and medical experts agreed to participate in the Delphi process and thus completed 3 rounds of surveys. The experts main characteristics were:

ROLE*

64%
Medical experts

46%
High performance experts

INVOLVEMENT

73%
Club football

27%
National teams

AGE

29%
Under 40

42%
Aged 41-50

29%
Over 50

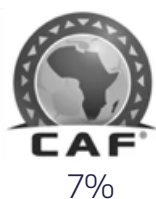
EXPERIENCE

22%
Under 10 years

54%
11-20 years

24%
Over 20 years

CONFEDERATION



* Some experts had double functions for their employer

MEDICAL POSITION STATEMENTS



MEDICAL POSITION STATEMENTS

Through the Delphi process and its three rounds of surveys, 12 recommendations reached the consensus threshold among medical and performance experts.



1

OFF-SEASON BREAK

Players should be guaranteed a minimum of 4 weeks between seasons (off-season break), with no club or national team travel, training or media commitments.

2

OFF-SEASON BREAK

The off-season break should include a black out period of 2 weeks (without any contact with club or national team).

3

OFF-SEASON BREAK

There should be a minimum 4-week retraining period after an off-season break before starting with the competition.

4

OFF-SEASON BREAK

Clubs should provide players with optional monitoring (e.g. following a prescribed training program or wellness monitoring) during the off-season break.

5

IN SEASON REST & RECOVERY

There should be a minimum of two days between appearances to allow players to adequately recover.

6

IN SEASON REST & RECOVERY

A diagnosed injured player should not compete in a match until cleared by a medical professional from the player's club.

7

IN SEASON REST & RECOVERY

Players should have a mandatory of one day off per week.

8

MID-SEASON BREAK

There should be a mandatory mid-season break of 1 week, with no club or national team travel, training or media commitments.

9

TRAVEL

The increased burden of travel resulting in either travel fatigue or jet lag should be considered when scheduling fixture calendars.

10

TRAVEL

There should be a rest period between a long-haul flight and a subsequent squad inclusion to adequately recover from either travel fatigue or jet lag.

11

YOUNG PLAYER SAFEGUARDS

There should be specific workload safeguards for academy players (under 18 years old).

12

YOUNG PLAYER SAFEGUARDS

More research is needed to decide whether there should be specific workload safeguards for young players (under 21 years old).

ADDITIONAL EXPERT FINDINGS



ADDITIONAL EXPERT FINDINGS

Seven statements were supported by the majority of medical and performance experts but did not reach the consensus threshold of 75%.

MATCH WORKLOAD LIMIT

69%

of experts agreed that there should be a limit on the number of matches played per season but disagreed on the exact number.

MATCH WORKLOAD LIMIT

67%

supported separate limits for club and national team matches - players should be available to represent their country.

FIXTURE CONGESTION

60%

of experts were for a maximum of 3 consecutive weeks with 2 appearances per week.

FIXTURE CONGESTION

64%

were against a limit on consecutive back-to-back squad inclusions.

OFF-SEASON MONITORING

67%

of experts agreed that players should be monitored during the off-season.

TRAVEL BURDEN

69%

supported a 2-day rest period between long-haul flights and subsequent squad inclusions.

YOUNG PLAYER SAFEGUARDS

70%

of experts endorsed specific workload safeguards for U21 players but called for more research on the specifics.

ANNEX



METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE DELPHI PROCESS

A modified Delphi study by means of electronic survey was conducted from February to March 2025. Experts working in the performance or medical team in men professional football (either club or national team) were invited to complete 3 round of electronic surveys.

The survey Round 1 was based on the scientific literature (medical as well as occupational and legal safety) literature and the view of players and staff members, including 19 statements. Experts rated their level of agreement on a 5-point liker scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree), with a consensus threshold set at 75% (dis)agreement. Open text boxes were provided to allow experts to provide additional comments. Statements that reached consensus ($\geq 75\%$) were included in the final results of the study. Statements with a majority ($\geq 50\%$) agreement or disagreement advanced to survey Round 2 while statements with less than 50% agreement or disagreement were removed from the study.

For the survey Round 2, experts rated their level of agreement on a 4-point liker scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree), with a consensus threshold set at 75% (dis)agreement. Open text boxes were again provided to allow experts to provide additional comments. Statements that reached consensus ($\geq 75\%$) were included in the final final results of the study. Statements where at least two-thirds ($\geq 66.7\%$) of experts agreed or disagreed were rephrased for survey Round 3, based on the experts' qualitative responses. Statements with less than two-thirds agreement or disagreement were removed from the study.

For survey round 3, experts rated their level of agreement on a 4-point liker scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree), with a consensus threshold set at 75% (dis)agreement. Statements that reached consensus ($\geq 75\%$) were included in the final results of the study, while those failing to reach consensus were removed from the study.

RESULTS OF THE DELPHI PROCESS

Round 1: Level of Agreement with Statements (1-5)

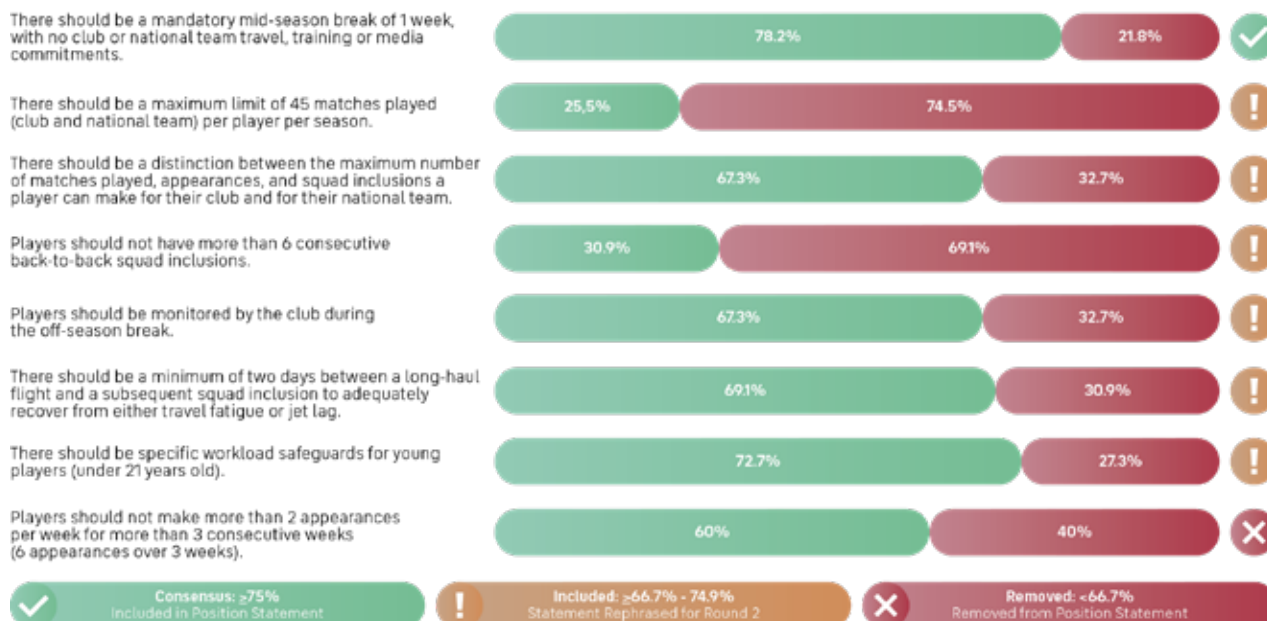
Agree (4-5) Neutral (3) Disagree (1-2)



RESULTS OF THE DELPHI PROCESS

Round 2: Level of Agreement with Statements (1-4)

Agree (3-4) Disagree (1-2)



Round 3: Level of Agreement with Statements (1-4)

Agree (3-4) Disagree (1-2)



DEFINITIONS

Matches Played: When a player plays at least 45 minutes in a competitive match, either as a starter or after being substituted on.

Appearance: When a player plays any minutes in a competitive match, either as a starter or after being substituted on.

Squad inclusion: The number of times a player was part of a competitive matchday squad, whether they played any minutes or were an unused substitute.

Back-to-back appearances: When a player makes an appearance, and his previous match appearance ended within the preceding 5 days (typical sequence being weekend-midweek).

Back-to-back squad inclusion: When a player is part of a matchday squad, and his previous matchday squad ended within the preceding 5 days (typical sequence being weekend-midweek).

Off-Season Break: The period (expressed in calendar days) spent outside of the club or national team environment without matches, training or media commitments a player is provided by their club between two seasons in order to recover and regenerate.

Blackout period: A period within the off-season break with no communication from club or national team.

Mid-Season Break: The period (expressed in calendar days) spent outside of the club or national team environment without matches, training or media commitments a player is provided by their club within a season in order to recover and regenerate.

Jet Lag: Temporary disorder occurring after rapid travel across multiple (3 or more) time zones, resulting from a misalignment between the body's internal clock and the new destination time zone and leading to sleep patterns and hormonal regulation disturbances.

Travel Fatigue: Exhaustion and tiredness that individuals experience due to long journeys, particularly those involving extensive travel, such as flights or road trips, regardless of time zone changes.

Long-haul flight: A flight that exceeds six hours.

