

# **2024** FROM HIGH-USAGE TO UNDERLOAD: A TALE OF TWO INDUSTRIES

FIFPRO PLAYER WORKLOAD MONITORING

Women's Football Report



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# 01 / WELCOME

Welcome to the 2024 Player Workload Monitoring report, focusing on the season 2023/2024, culminating at the Paris Olympic games 2024. In this report, we provide an overview of the season 2023/2024 through the lens of workload and playing opportunities for players at both international and domestic level.

This report is the fourth edition of the Player Workload Monitoring report. Following the FIFPRO 2023 Pathway to the Women's World Cup report, the 2022 UEFA Women's Euros workload journey report and the 2021 FIFPRO Player Workload Monitoring Annual Women's Report.

What is captured within this report are consistent, but critical themes within professional women's football. There are players who we have termed 'high-usage' who are particularly squeezed with the number of games, back-to-back appearances, and minutes played. However, concurrently there is a large proportion of players who are underloaded and are not playing enough competitive minutes. Meaning that a huge disparity exists within the industry between players and their playing time.

Whilst this disparity exists, the growth and expansion of domestic and international competitions are underway in some parts of the world. This report examines new and expanding competitions, placing them in a broader context of what this will mean for players, both in the category of high-usage and underloaded.

For the eco-system of women's football to develop sustainably, protecting players wellbeing and providing environments where they can perform, with solutions built on evidence are required to inform decision-makers and support player-performance and the development of women's football globally.



**Stephane Burchkalter**  
Acting Secretary General, FIFPRO

## A CALL TO ACTION



### 01

#### CONTINUED EXPANSION OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CLUB FOOTBALL TO ADDRESS IMBALANCE IN THE CALENDAR

To ensure that professional women's football continues to thrive, a calendar that works for all players is imperative. FIFPRO urges competition organisers to address underload as an issue for players. Domestic club football is paramount to the overall sustainability and competitiveness of the professional women's game. It is evident that some competitions are expanding and developing, while others remain stagnant. FIFPRO urges competition organisers to prioritise the fragmented playing opportunities for underloaded players, providing more competitive opportunities for all players and affording them access to development and performance.



### 02

#### NEW AND EXPANDED COMPETITIONS SHOULD PRIORITISE CONDITIONS FOR HIGH-PERFORMANCE ATHLETES

FIFPRO asserts that as existing competitions expand and new competitions are introduced, the conditions that are provided for players should be sufficient for high-performance athletes to perform, rest and recover. FIFPRO research indicates that while match and travel load are both increasing for players, they are not afforded the conditions they require to perform. FIFPRO calls on competition organisers to address these issues, ensuring that they provide players with a platform to thrive.



### 03

#### MORE STANDARDISED PROFESSIONALISM THROUGHOUT LEAGUES TO ADDRESS COMPETITIVE BALANCE

FIFPRO asserts that through purposeful investment and standardizing professional criteria, leagues would be more competitive, providing better commercial viability, sustainability and attractiveness to players. Clubs and leagues should continue to invest and have regulated standards across the leagues in identified areas that would elevate the overall standards. FIFPRO establishes that regulation through Collective Bargaining Agreements (and similar) creates environments where winning games and championships is possible for all teams as players thrive on and off the field.



# 02

## KEY FINDINGS

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# 02 / KEY FINDINGS



## 01

### 2023/24 SEASON OVERVIEW: HIGH-USAGE PLAYERS ARE BEING SQUEEZED CONSISTENTLY

Based on the data collected for the Women's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) data platform over several seasons, it is evident that playing opportunities are not distributed equally between players; there are players who accumulate a much higher number of matches in a single season and a larger proportion of players who play considerably less. While the best players in the world are highly sought after by competition organisers to play in their competitions, this contributes to calendar imbalance. Moreover, without mandated in-season and off-season breaks, the players are the ones who are burdened physically and mentally.



## 02

### UNDERLOAD IS AN ISSUE FOR THE MAJORITY OF PLAYERS

Underload is pervasive issue in professional women's football. This issue is often overlooked, yet it exists as a problem for a large proportion of players globally. Looking back at the 2023/24 season, examining only those who participated in the more common fall-spring schedule type leagues – most players, played an average of 33 games per season and even with season breaks, this is much less than one match a week for the duration of the entire season. To ensure a more proportionate distribution of competitive matches a match calendar that works for all is key. In addition, continued expansion of competitions such as league development across the globe should be a priority for competition organisers.



## 03

### 2024 PARIS OLYMPICS PREPARATION: A STORY OF WORKLOAD DISPARITY BETWEEN TEAMS

The journey up and to the 2024 Paris Olympics was vastly varied amongst competing players as underload and high-usage issues were brought into sharp focus. In the period preceding the Olympics, most players involved experienced underload, whereas high-usage players sometimes playing up to 30 games more per season than most other players. In fact, New Zealand, Brazil, Colombia, and Nigeria all had players in their Olympic squads who had fewer than 10 appearances over the course of the year leading up to the tournament.



## 04

### UNEVEN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS

Many leagues and regions strive for competition expansion as the game continues to grow. However, the pace of these developments is uneven; while UEFA and CONCACAF have created major new competitions recently, other regions seemingly lag behind them. This variance is also noticeable within domestic leagues as some have had significant size increases (e.g., NWSL), while other top leagues stay with the same format for many seasons (e.g., WSL in England). While competition expansion and development are key to the continued growth of women's football, ensuring that the conditions, prize money, with equitable distribution and remuneration for players must meet the threshold for high-performance athletes. Rather than growth for growth's sake, growth with the appropriate and meaningful conditions is paramount for a sustainable football eco-system where players can thrive.



## 05

### COMPETITIVE (IM)BALANCE EXISTS IN MANY TOP LEAGUES

Jeopardy is a key driver of interest in football. Jeopardy, or uncertainty in games, means that teams have an equal chance of winning any one game, or league. The NWSL, across most competitive balance measures over the last decade, is the most equal of our assessed leagues, meaning that its teams are generally quite close to each other in terms of on-pitch quality and competitiveness. However, many other leagues have shown signs of increasing imbalance. Even the UEFA Women's Champions League, a competition that is intended to feature Europe's best, had very one-sided outcomes in recent years. Some elite clubs also dominate their domestic league; FC Barcelona and Chelsea, for example, have both won five league titles in a row.



## 06

### INDIVIDUAL PLAYER WORKLOAD JOURNEYS

In today's game, top players around the world sometimes make 60+ appearances and accumulate 5,000+ minutes in a single season. However, such a heavy workload is not limited to just on-pitch performances as some players are also required to frequently travel significant distances across the world. Additionally, such workload commitments also provide limited opportunities for players to rest between club and national team appearances.

# 03

## 2023/24 SEASON OVERVIEW

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The 2023/24 season proved to be exceptionally demanding for high-usage players due to the stresses of the international match calendar. For many, the summer after the domestic season brought national team qualifying matches and the Paris Olympic Games. In this chapter we first analyse the players who recorded the highest match and travel loads in 2023/24, then dive deeper into workload metrics to assess how different top teams managed the challenges presented by the calendar.



# 03 / 2023/24 SEASON OVERVIEW

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### AT A GLANCE - CHAPTER 03

- » There are only a few players in the PWM database who played 50+ matches last season; underload is still a significant issue in women's football.
- » Even with a limited number of matches overall, many professionals routinely accumulate significant travel time, mainly due to national team competitions.
- » Squad utilisation trends show significant differences between top clubs; some are regularly able to rotate players while others constantly rely on the same, small group.

## WORKLOAD RANKINGS IN 2023/24

The following section chapter highlights the leading players in key workload metrics providing insights into the different experiences faced by today's professionals. The analysis is based entirely on the global 300-player sample of the FIFPRO Women's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform. For more information about the sample and the platform itself, please refer to **Chapter 08**.

It is important to note that the statistics presented here consider only competitive club matches and competitive or friendly national team matches the players were involved in. The analytical period considers the 2023/24 season that for most players started in July or August 2023 and ended with the conclusion of the Paris Olympic Games in August 2024.

### Match Load

Based on data collected for the PWM platform over several seasons, it is evident that playing opportunities are not distributed equally between players; the majority of players can be considered as "underloaded" with sometimes lengthy breaks between their appearances on the pitch, while there are some who accumulate a much higher number of matches in a single season. Access to competitions, regular national team assemblies, and the level of professionalisation in different regions are factors that contribute to these discrepancies.

Looking back at the 2023/24 season and examining only those who participated in the more common fall-spring schedule type leagues in 2023/24 (excluding those where the seasons line up with the calendar years, e.g., the leagues of the United States, Brazil, Colombia, Korea Republic, Sweden, etc.), **players of the PWM platform made 33 appearances each on average**. Even if we consider season breaks, this is much less than one match a week for the duration of the entire season.

At the top end of the 'appearances made' ranking, there are footballers who participated in almost twice as many matches as the average, although there are only a few of them within the sample. It is notable though that even within the list of Top 15 appearance makers in the PWM platform, there is a significant drop-off: first-placed Mariona Caldentey accumulated 28% more games than those ranked at the 11th-15th places.

It is also telling that four of the top six places are occupied by FC Barcelona players. As one of the best teams in the world, the side participated in – and eventually won – four different major competitions in 2023/24 (Liga F, Copa de la Reina, Supercopa de España Femenina and the UEFA Women's Champions League). Their domestic league consists of 30 rounds, which means that their players have access to more playing opportunities. In addition, many FC Barcelona players are also regulars in their respective national teams, further adding to their match load.

In general, international football is a key driving force behind the high match load of players featured in the Top 15: all of them had at least seven international club games and 12 national team appearances over the course of 2023/24.

The 15 players accumulated 803 appearances in total between them. 52.3% were recorded in domestic club matches (league, cup, super cup), while the second largest contributors were national team competitions with 29.4%. Crucially, only 18.3% of appearances were made in an international club competition setting such as the UEFA Women's Champions League.

The total number of minutes spent on the pitch is another relevant aspect when assessing match load and there is indeed large variance even between the Top 15 appearance makers. For example, while Moeka Minami (AS Roma and Japan) was very rarely substituted and played over 96 minutes on every occasion, Hayley Raso's (Real Madrid and Australia) average was much lower at 52 minutes due to frequent and short substitute appearances. This difference can also be attributed to the positional differences of the players, Raso is a forward player and therefore is more likely to be substituted than a defender like Minami.

### Top 15 players by match appearances made in the 2023/24 season

Rank	Player name	Club in 2023/24	Nationality	Total appearances made	of which: domestic club	of which: international club	of which: national team	Total minutes played	Minutes played per appearance
1	MARIONA CALDENTEY		Spain	64	35	11	18	4,498	70.3
2	ATHENEA DEL CASTILLO		Spain	61	33	8	20	4,335	71.1
3	AITANA BONMATÍ		Spain	57	30	11	16	4,623	81.1
4	ONA BATLLE		Spain	56	29	10	17	4,946	88.3
5	SAKI KUMAGAI		Japan	54	31	8	15	4,583	84.9
6	INGRID SYRSTAD ENGEN		Norway	53	29	11	13	4,252	80.2
-	ONEMA GRACE GEYORO		France	53	25	12	16	4,702	88.7
8	MOEKA MINAMI		Japan	52	30	7	15	5,029	96.7
-	HAYLEY RASO		Australia	52	31	8	13	2,690	51.7
10	KEIRA WALSH		England	51	28	11	12	4,034	79.1
11	LUCY BRONZE		England	50	28	10	12	4,016	80.3
-	KADIDIATOU DIANI		France	50	22	11	17	3,619	72.4
-	SAKINA KARCHADOU		France	50	21	12	17	4,489	89.8
-	LINDSEY HORAN		USA	50	18	9	23	4,433	88.7
-	VALENTINA GIACINTI		Italy	50	30	8	12	3,486	69.7

Source: FIFPRO Women's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform, Football Benchmark analysis



### Recovery

Whilst the growth of the women’s game has accelerated in some parts of the world, simultaneously other regions are still characterised by underdevelopment. This means that underload and high-usage are two issues that affect different players at the same time. Underload and the lack of high-quality match opportunities is still an issue for the majority of players, whereas top international players in today’s game are involved in multiple different competitions in a single season, both for club and country.

The back-to-back match appearance metric is useful to gauge how congested the calendar could get for some players. In the PWM terminology, a match appearance is categorised as “back-to-back” if the player did not have at least five full days (120 hours) of rest since the end of their previous match appearance. Prolonged exposure to back-to-back matches means that the player is not afforded sufficient time for recovery between games, which could adversely affect their performances, their wellbeing, and increase the risk of injuries.

Considering only those who participated in the more common fall-spring schedule type leagues in 2023/24, an average player in the PWM platform had 14 such matches last season. The table below shows the 15 players with the highest figures in this metric. The highest-ranked Mariona Caldentey accumulated three times as many back-to-back appearances as the average player. She is followed by several team-mates from FC Barcelona. One of the drivers of this phenomenon is the packed match schedule of the Catalan club: even with squad rotation, key players can record a high number of games every season..

It should be noted that all players featuring in the ranking played at least 56% of their games in a “back-to-back” setting, in some cases reaching close to 70%. For them, sustained match load and congested periods are the norm rather than the exception.

### Top 15 players by back-to-back appearances made in the 2023/24 season

Rank	Player name	Club in 2023/24	Nationality	Total back-to-back appearances	of which: domestic club	of which: international club	of which: national team	Total appearances	Back-to-back appearances as % of total
1	MARIONA CALDENTEY		Spain	44	25	9	10	64	69%
2	ATHENA DEL CASTILLO		Spain	40	20	7	13	61	66%
3	AITANA BONMATÍ		Spain	37	19	8	10	57	65%
4	ONA BATLLE		Spain	33	17	6	10	56	59%
-	SAKI KUMAGAI		Japan	33	17	7	9	54	61%
6	KEIRA WALSH		England	32	17	9	6	51	63%
7	INGRID SYRSTAD ENGEN		Norway	31	16	8	7	53	58%
-	VALENTINA GIACINTI		Italy	31	17	7	7	50	62%
9	ONEMA GRACE GEYORO		France	30	12	9	9	53	57%
-	ELENA LINARI		Italy	30	16	6	8	47	64%
11	HAYLEY RASO		Australia	29	15	7	7	52	56%
-	ALEXIA PUTELLAS		Spain	29	15	4	10	43	67%
13	KADIATOU DIANI		France	28	11	5	12	50	56%
-	ASHLEY LAWRENCE		Canada	28	12	5	11	49	57%
-	MANUELA GIUGLIANO		Italy	28	16	7	5	49	57%

Source: FIFPRO Women’s Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform, Football Benchmark analysis

### International travel

Travelling to and from matches is a significant part of a professional footballer’s work commitments, especially for those who are involved in several international competitions. Looking at the travel load ranking for the 2023/24 season, it is striking to see that those at the top end spent over 7 days (or 2%+) of their year with international flights to matches. This finding underlines the challenges posed by the match calendar as these players often travel in substandard conditions, have to acclimatise to a different climate and deal with the effects of time zone changes on top of their travel load.

Another notable feature is that the list of Top 10 players by travel load includes no fewer than six Australian players employed by European clubs. There were several matches in 2023/24 that required them to take long-distance flights to Australia or other parts of the world as part of their national team duty, including Olympic qualifying matches in Asia and friendlies hosted in Canada and in the US.

Please note that in this analysis only (cross-border) international trips were considered, as well as those flights that the players made while away on tour with their national team or club. Factoring in domestic travel by plane, train, or bus would further increase the demands placed on players. The analysed period encompassed the 2023/24 season up until the conclusion of the Paris Olympic Games.

### Top 10 players by international travel load in the 2023/24 season

Rank	Player name	Club in 2023/24	Nationality	International travel time (hours)	Travel distance (km)	Total trips made
1	HAYLEY RASO		Australia	190	147,498	21
2	ELLIE CARPENTER		Australia	186	143,077	24
3	CAITLIN FOORD		Australia	175	135,701	18
4	LINDSEY HORAN		USA	172	130,992	28
5	KYRA COONEY-CROSS		Australia	171	133,346	16
6	STEPH CATLEY		Australia	171	133,181	16
7	TEAGAN MICAH		Australia	166	130,144	13
8	REBEKAH STOTT		New Zealand	156	122,840	11
9	SAKI KUMAGAI		Japan	151	115,438	23
10	ASHLEY LAWRENCE		Canada	151	113,162	31

Source: FIFPRO Women’s Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform, Football Benchmark analysis



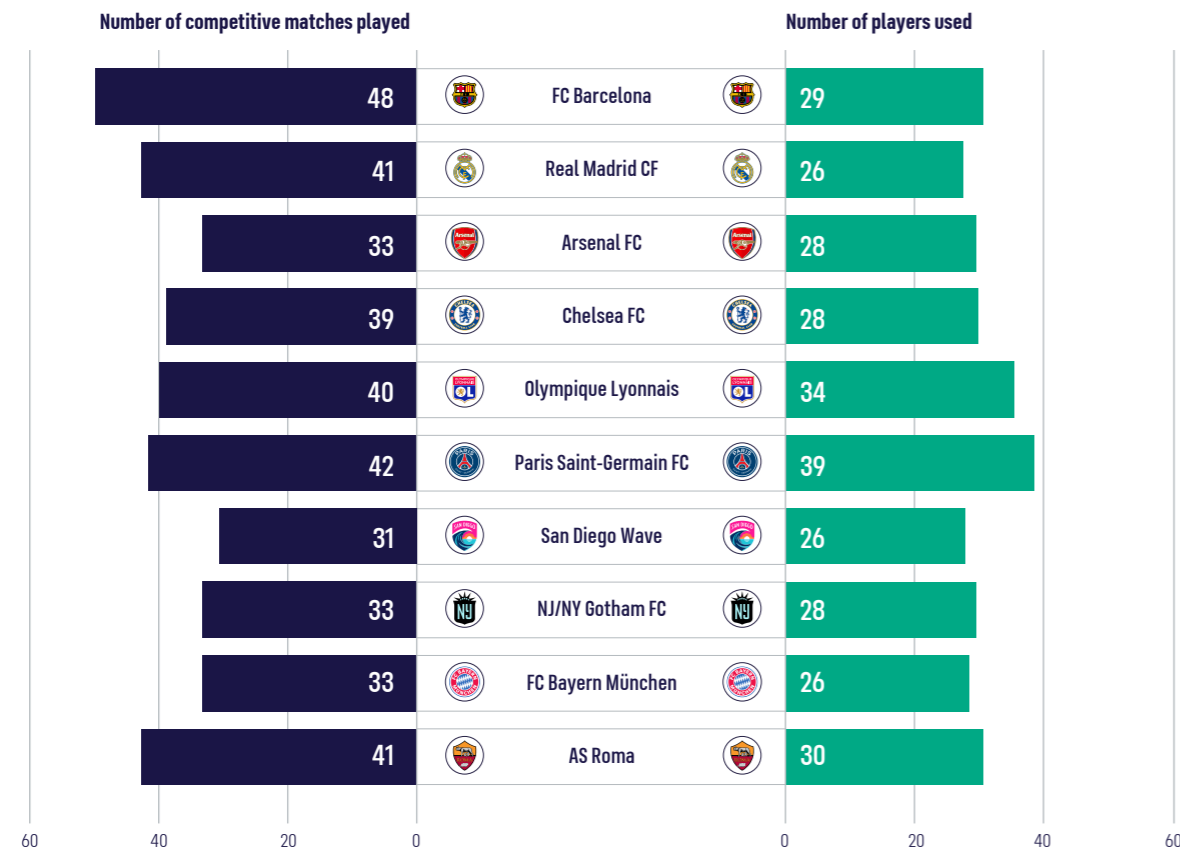
## SQUAD UTILISATION TRENDS OF 2023/24

Effectively managing workload through appropriate distribution of playing time and player rotation is essential for preserving player health, improving team performance, supporting player development, and reducing injury risk. This section presents how several prominent clubs from leading leagues address the challenges of player utilisation and the match calendar.

In our analytical approach, a total of ten professional clubs were selected, focusing on the 2023/24 and in the case of NWSL clubs, the 2024 season. These clubs were FC Barcelona (FCB), Real Madrid CF (RMA), Olympique Lyonnais (OLY), Paris Saint-Germain FC (PSG), Chelsea FC (CHE), Arsenal FC (ARS), FC Bayern München (BYM), AS Roma (ASR), NJ/NY Gotham FC (GTH) and San Diego Wave (SDW). The selected included four pairs of teams from the same leagues, showcasing different squad rotation strategies within the same domestic environments.

The underlying dataset included all their competitive matches in the selected season, both at the domestic and the international level, in the same club setting. Consequently, the national team match load and matches played for other clubs in the same seasons were excluded from the analysis. In the case of the two US clubs, NJ/NY Gotham FC and San Diego Wave, the 2024 regular NWSL season was assessed (without the playoff stage), together with the NWSL Challenge Cup and the group stage of the inaugural, 2024/25 edition of the CONCACAF W Champions Cup that took place in August-October 2024.

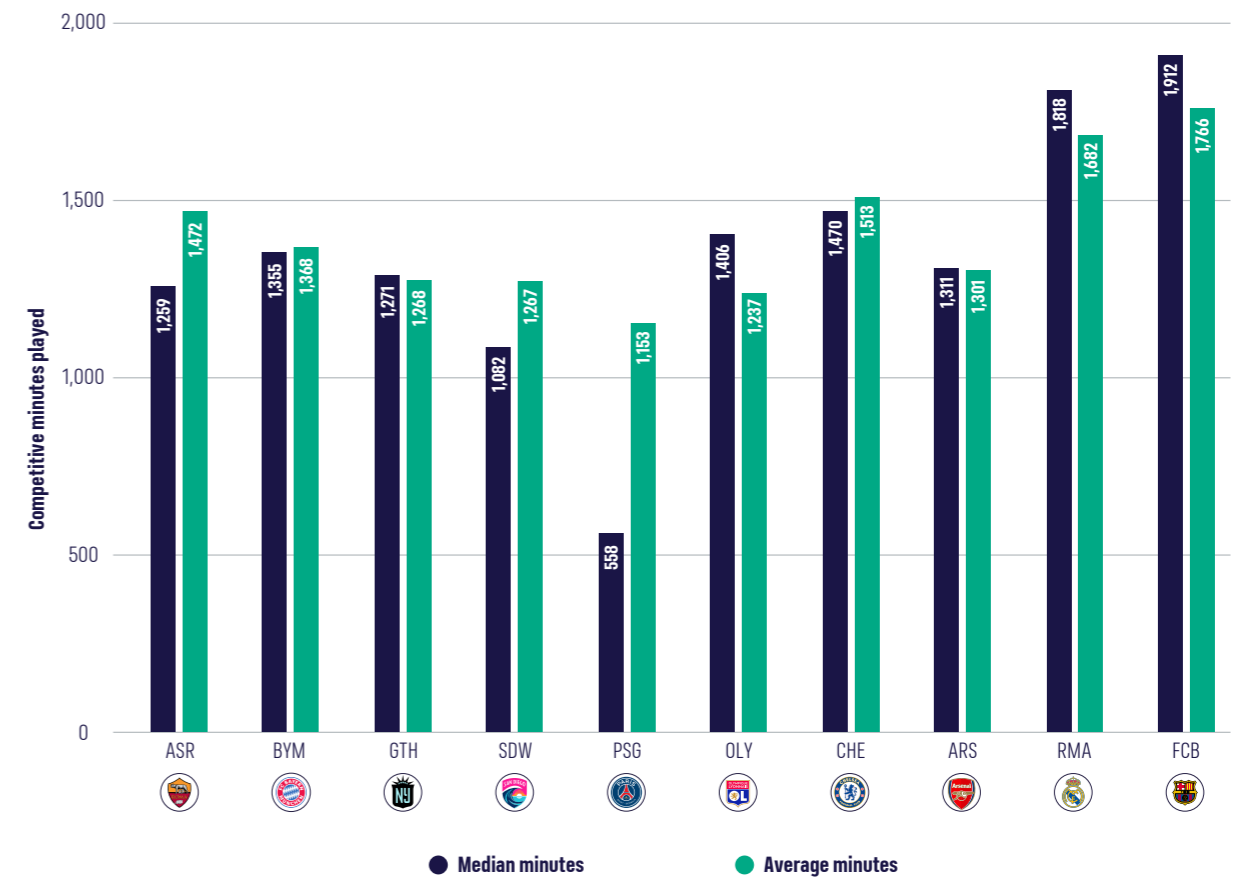
### Number of competitive matches played, and number of different players used in these games (2023/24 or 2024 seasons)



Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

Among the ten teams, FC Barcelona had the highest number of matches, playing a total of 48 games as they claimed the titles of Liga F, Copa de la Reina, Supercopa Femenina, and the UEFA Women's Champions League. Conversely, the two US clubs played the least amount of matches in our sample. Out of the two, San Diego Wave played the fewest in the most recent season (2024), with just 31 across the NWSL regular season, the restructured NWSL Challenge Cup (now a single-game, "Super Cup" format), and the newly introduced CONCACAF W Champions Cup. Regarding player utilisation, the two French clubs lead the way, with Olympique Lyonnais relying on 34 different players in the first-team squad and PSG utilising 39.

### Median and average minutes played by squad members with at least one competitive appearance (2023/24 or 2024 seasons)



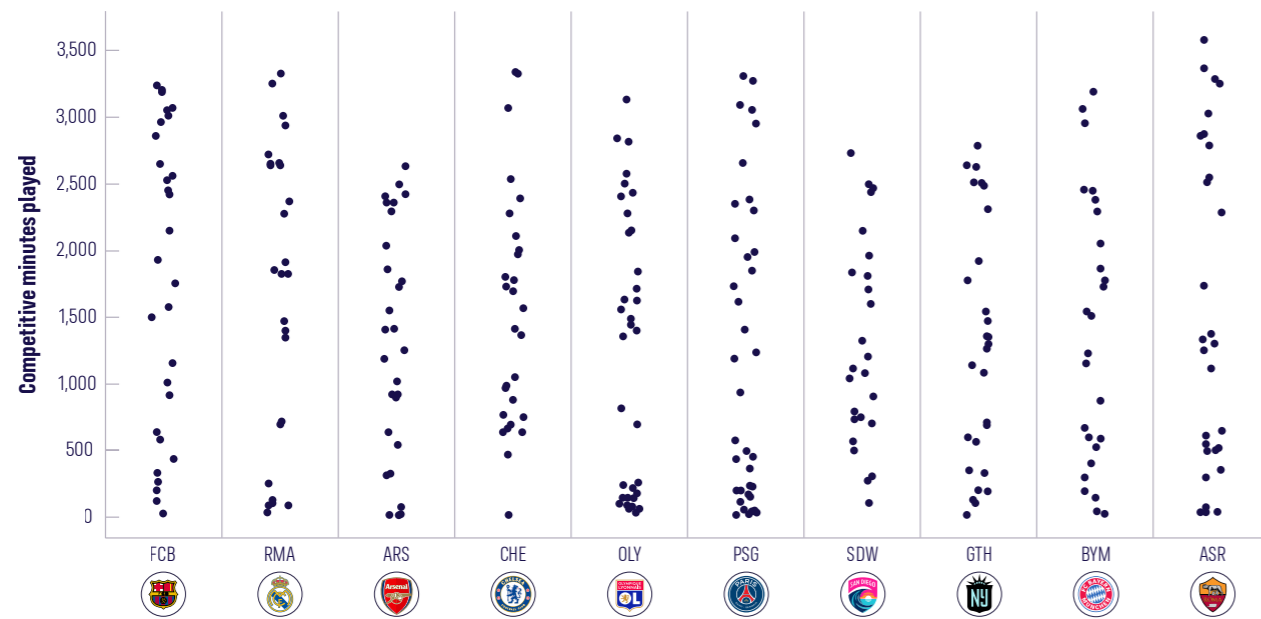
Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

Before analysing the median and average minutes played within these teams, it is important to highlight that team success typically leads to a greater number of matches as they advance to later rounds of a competition. This in turn increases the overall playing time for their players, as well.

It is thus not surprising to see that FC Barcelona had the highest median and average minutes played by their players, surpassing their domestic rivals, Real Madrid. The league size of the Spanish top division (16 teams) contributes to the prominence of the two Spanish clubs at the top, giving them more playing time opportunities.

On the other end of the scale, the median minutes played by PSG players was significantly lower at 558, which can be attributed to the high number of players the team used throughout the season.

**Distribution of playing time**



Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

The closing section visualizes all analysed players on one chart and shows how playing time was distributed between squad members at each of the ten clubs.

At the top end, all teams except for Arsenal, San Diego and Gotham, had at least a few stars on their books who played 3,000 or more minutes throughout the season. As for the two NWSL clubs, the increase in match load from 2023 to 2024, driven by the expansion of the league (Bay FC and Utah Royals joining as new franchises) and the launch of the CONCACAF W Champions Cup, was balanced by the matches that were removed from the NWSL Challenge Cup. As a result, no player exceeded 3,000 competitive minutes.

It is also clear from the visualization that there were many players with less than 500 minutes on record in a competitive setting at several teams, which reinforces the 'underload' argument. In general, the pool of high calibre players in women's football is still relatively small. Development pathways are often inconsistent or do not exist at all (even in some of the biggest leagues globally), which limits the "supply" of new talents coming into the game. Investment into development pathways, scouting and increasing employment opportunities for players is critical to ensure a viable football ecosystem.

**All in all, there are major disparities in how top clubs can and do approach squad rotation and the utilisation of their players. Sometimes it is by choice: there are a few top clubs that can afford to rest key players in certain periods of the season because they have quality replacements. This, however, is a rarity, as many others play an almost identical line-up every week and rely on the same core group due to the relatively smaller pool of players. An ecosystem with fragmented professionalisation and the lack of financial resources to maintain a larger squad contributes to these disparities in approach.**



# 04

## PREPARATION FOR THE PARIS OLYMPIC GAMES – SQUAD COMPARISON

The 2024 Paris Olympics was the eighth edition of the women's Olympic football tournament. Much like its previous editions, the make-up of competing teams was diverse in terms of geography, prior workload, and international experience. This chapter investigates the composition of these competing Olympic squads and assesses each squad by their respective players' club context, on-pitch minutes, and appearances for the year preceding the Olympics.



# 04 / PREPARATION FOR THE PARIS OLYMPIC GAMES - SQUAD COMPARISON

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### AT A GLANCE - CHAPTER 04

- » More than half of all players at the 2024 Paris Olympics played their club football in leagues in the US, England or Spain.
- » Spain, France, the US and Germany all had Olympic squads that accumulated more than 50,000 total minutes in the one-year period leading up to the tournament.
- » There is a large variance in the match experience of the twelve Olympic squads. Whereas Colombia had only five players with at least 30 appearances in the year before the tournament, Spain had no fewer than 17.

## INTRODUCTION

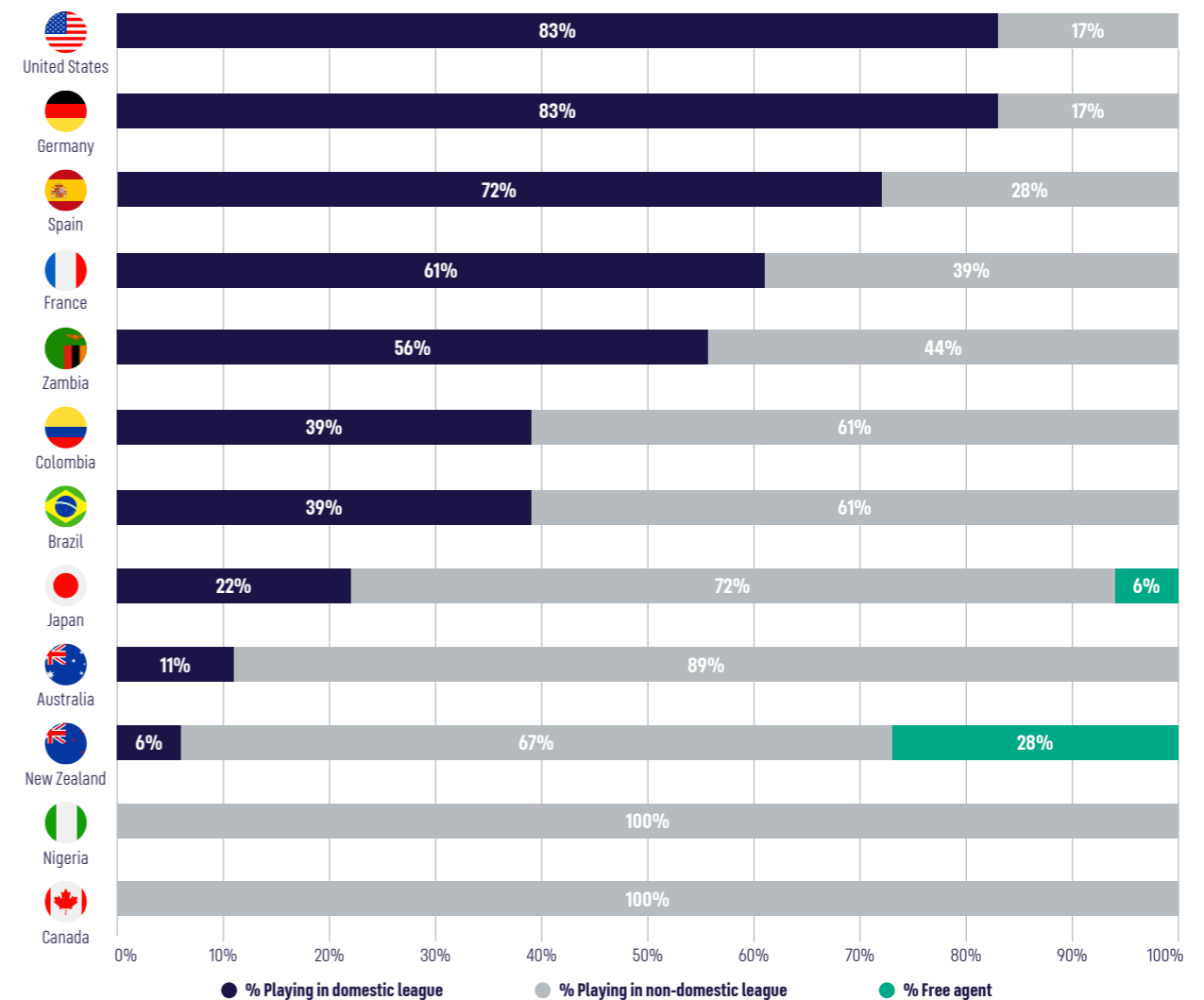
As part of this assessment, the year preceding the 2024 Paris Olympics covers the period from 21st August 2023 to 16th July 2024. These dates were chosen as it is just after the last major women's tournament (the FIFA Women's World Cup) and just before the start of the 2024 Paris Olympics. Additionally, for consistency between the competing nations at the 2024 Paris Olympics, only the 18 players that were included in the original squad have been included in the analysis (not the additional 4 'alternative squad' players). There is an exception if one of the original 18 squad players withdrew from their squad and thus was replaced by one of the 'alternative squad' players with the most minutes at the 2024 Paris Olympics who played in the same position as the withdrawing player.

Due to limited publicly available data, some of the analyses in this chapter do not include the Zambian national team. Similarly, available data on the Nigerian national team was not always complete and thus some minor assumptions around workload have been made based on their reported fixtures during the assessed period.

## WHERE ARE THEY PLAYING? SQUAD COMPARISON BY CLUB CONTEXT

As will be discussed in later chapters, many different club and national team competitions in the women's game have (or will soon be) expanded. However, despite this growth amongst a diverse range of leagues and competition expansion, the level of development has not been consistent, with professional and financial resources being unevenly spread across football. Consequently, top talents continue to ply their trade in countries where the level of finances, professionalism and overall standards are superior to what they may see in their home countries' domestic league.

Breakdown of squads based on club context (at the start of the Olympic Games)



Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

## KEY INSIGHTS

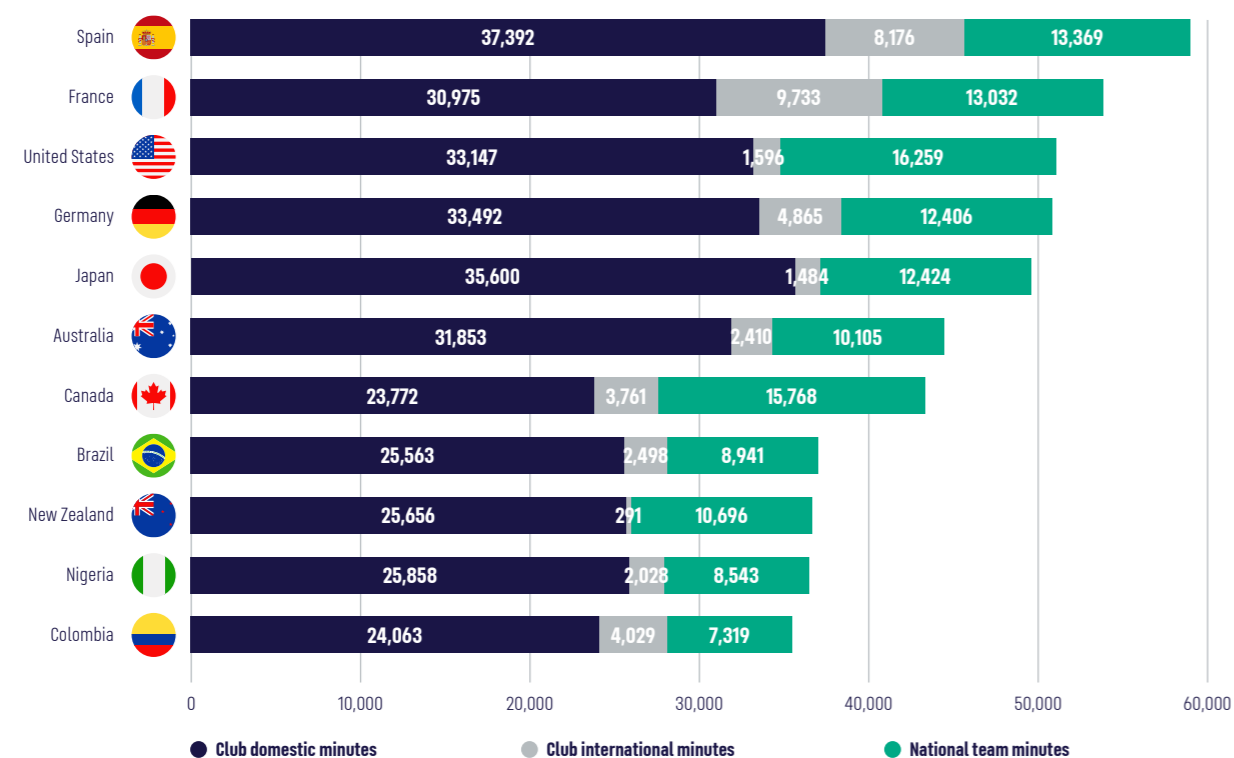
- » None of the assessed national teams consist entirely of players competing in their respective home country's league. Canada and Nigeria rely entirely on players plying their trade abroad. However, in Canada's case, it should be noted that the country does not currently have a professional women's top-division league. However, one is set to launch in 2025 (Northern Super League).
- » The US, Germany and Spain all have more than 70% of their national team squad at the 2024 Paris Olympics plying their trade in their respective domestic leagues.
- » Domestic leagues in the US (24%), England (18%) and Spain (13%) contribute significantly to the make-up of all twelve national team squads at the 2024 Paris Olympics; as 55% of players come from these leagues. This highlights the significant presence and influence of these leagues in women's football on the global stage and the relative strength of their clubs compared to others.

## HOW PREPARED WERE THEY? SQUAD COMPARISON BY ON-PITCH MINUTES

In this section, an assessment is undertaken around the total minutes (across a player's club and national team) accumulated by players for each national team at the 2024 Paris Olympics over the analysed period. This assessment has been done by looking at the aggregate total minutes of players within each national team as well as the average, maximum and minimum for players within each national team.

It is unsurprising to see that those nations with relatively well-established and professional domestic leagues that compete in continental competitions e.g. Spain, France and Germany have, as a squad, accumulated some of the most total minutes over the period. Conversely, nations with less developed domestic leagues and play in limited continental competitions e.g. New Zealand, Nigeria and Colombia have, as a squad, accumulated fewer total minutes over the assessed period.

### Breakdown of minutes played by 2024 Olympic squads by competition type

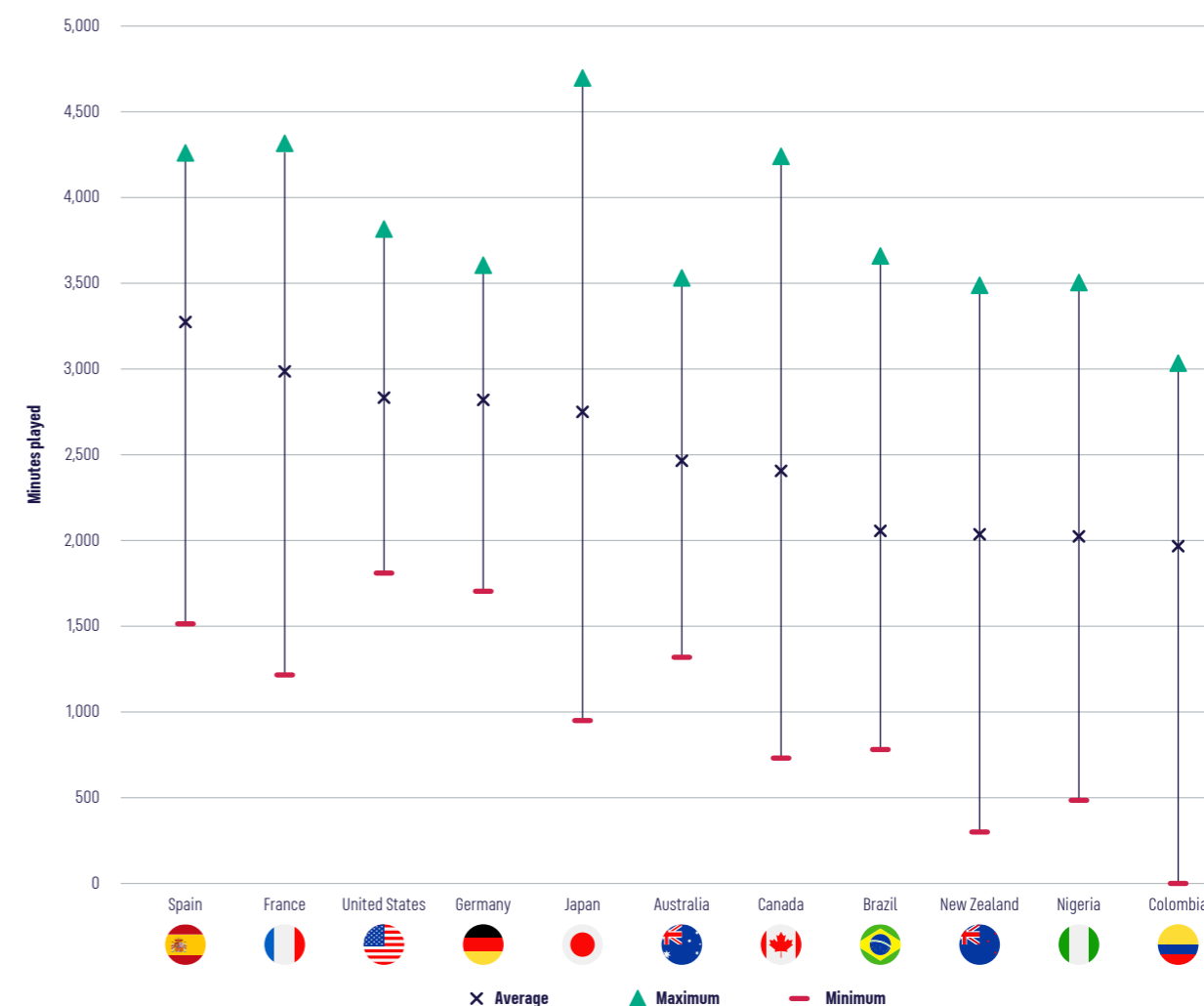


Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

### KEY INSIGHTS

- » When considering the total minutes played during the analysed period for each of these 2024 Paris Olympics nations, Spain emerges as the clear leader in the ranking, followed by France, the US and Germany. All of which have accumulated more than 50,000 total minutes in the squad across the period. It is worth noting that Spain also has the largest league in Europe with 16 teams.
- » Conversely, nations such as Brazil, New Zealand, Nigeria, and Colombia lag behind, all having below 38,000 total squad minutes. Notably, Colombia's league runs for between four to six months per season (2023/2024).

### Comparison between lowest, highest, and average minutes played by a squad member



Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

### KEY INSIGHTS

- » It is a similar story when looking at the average total minutes for each nation's squad member at the 2024 Paris Olympics as Spain, France, the US, and Germany come out on top over the assessed period. Moreover, New Zealand, Nigeria and Colombia were at the bottom of this metric.
- » Concerning the maximum total minutes among each player from the competing teams, Japan had the player who accumulated the most minutes during the assessed period. This player was Moeka Minami, who had accumulated 48 appearances for Japan and her club team AS Roma combined prior to the Olympics.
- » The nation with the biggest gap between their players with the highest and the lowest total minutes accumulated over the period was Japan (3,750 minutes). On the other hand, the smallest gap was for Germany (1,904 min gap) suggesting the relatively equitable workload between German players at the competition. This small gap is partly because of the make-up of the German squad at the Olympics: 15 out of 18 were playing their club football in the Frauen-Bundesliga thus accumulating a similar number of minutes as one another.

## DISTRIBUTION OF MATCH EXPERIENCE WITHIN A SQUAD

The women's game has seen an unprecedented level of growth in some parts of the world. With this growth has come increased recognition and professionalisation globally. However, a significant disparity persists in terms of the availability of quality playing time for women's football players across the globe. Underload is a key problem for the majority of professional women's footballers, especially in countries where domestic football leagues have not yet professionalised.

For a better understanding, we have categorised all players within the 2024 Paris Olympic 18-person squads into four groups based on the total number of match appearances they made. Naturally, more players in a higher category imply that a squad had accumulated more total match minutes over the analysed period and has more opportunity to prepare for the tournament, conversely, players in the higher category have played more games and therefore fatigue could be an issue.

### Number of players by range of appearances made in the year leading up to the Olympics

Nation	0-9 Appearances	10-19 Appearances	20-29 Appearances	30+ Appearances
Spain	-	-	1	17
France	-	-	2	16
Germany	-	-	4	14
United States	-	-	4	14
Canada	-	4	3	11
Japan	-	2	5	11
Australia	-	1	7	10
New Zealand	2	1	6	9
Nigeria	1	6	3	8
Brazil	1	2	8	7
Colombia	2	4	7	5

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

### KEY INSIGHTS

- » Consistently, Spain, France, the US, and Germany had the greatest proportion (78%+) of their players playing 30+ appearances across the assessed period. In comparison, New Zealand, Nigeria, Brazil, and Colombia all had less than 50%, with the latter specifically only achieving 28%.
- » In fact, these bottom four countries were the only ones to have players in their squad accumulating less than 10 appearances prior to the 2024 Paris Olympics in the analysed period, illustrating the underload issue.
- » Despite not currently having a professional league, Canada ranked fifth in terms of the number of players in their 2024 Olympic squad with 30+ appearances during the period (tied with Japan). This has occurred as all their players play in professional leagues abroad with the majority of them (83%) employed by a US or English club.



## 05

## COMPETITION LANDSCAPE – RECENT AND UPCOMING CHANGES

New competitions are emerging in professional women's football, with some existing competitions also expanding. This chapter examines the changes since the 2022/23 season and outlines those planned for the future. For a comprehensive view, the analysis covers national team tournaments, as well as international and domestic club competitions. Finally, a match load projection is undertaken to assess the workload of different player profiles in context of the new competition landscape.



# 05

## COMPETITION LANDSCAPE – RECENT AND UPCOMING CHANGES

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

#### AT A GLANCE – CHAPTER 05

- » Three new major national team competitions have been launched or announced since the 2022/23 season, underlining the global growth of the game.
- » In terms of international club competitions, Africa and South America are the only continents without any major expansions in recent years.
- » Competition growth in general seems to be “lopsided”: more tournaments and playing opportunities are added for top international players, while the underload problem persists for many.

#### GLOBAL



**FIFA Women's World Cup**  
Expanded competition with 8 more teams participating in the 2023 edition.



**CONMEBOL/UEFA Women's Finalissima\***  
New competition that started in 2023 with two teams competing in a single match.



#### CONCACAF N/C AMERICA



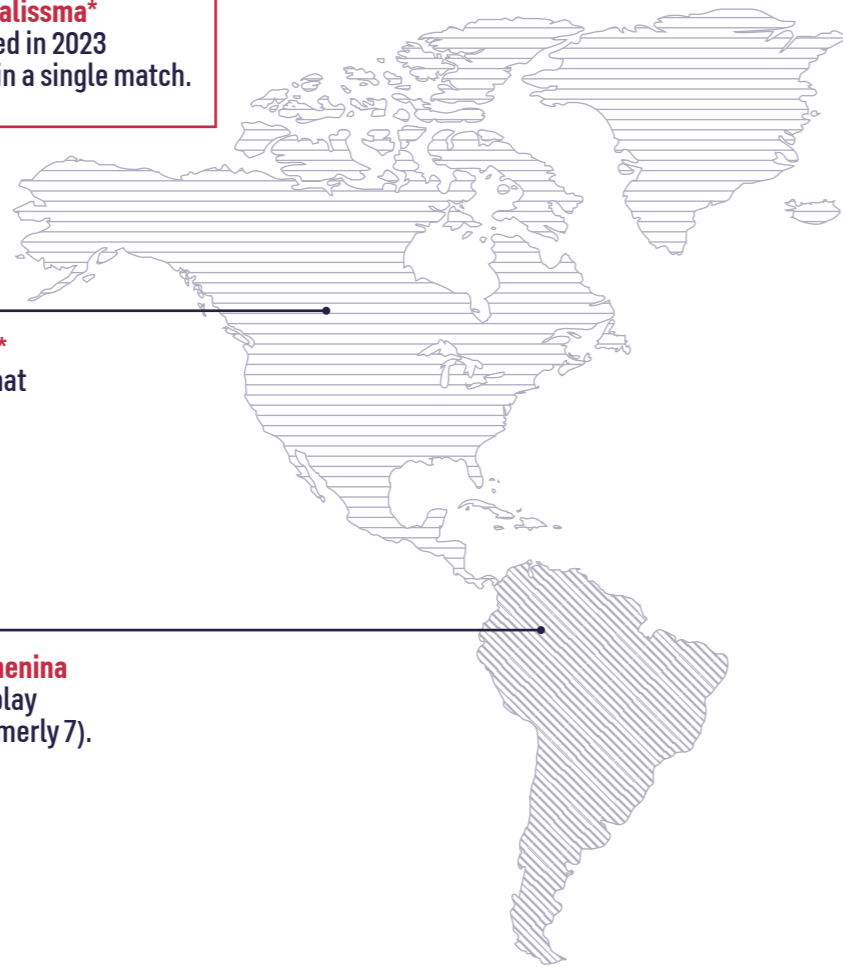
**CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup\***  
New 12-team competition that started in 2024.



#### SOUTH AMERICA



**CONMEBOL Copa America Femenina**  
As of 2022, teams can now play a maximum of 6 games (formerly 7).



### NATIONAL TEAM COMPETITIONS

At the national team level, there have been many recent and upcoming competition changes across various regions. The below world map visual highlights key competition changes with an elaborated commentary provided further below.

Overall, expansion and growth are the general themes that are common amongst most regions. However, such growth is not evenly spread with some regions fostering significant development whereas others are seemingly lagging behind.

Recently launched competitions and those that are already announced to start soon are marked with an asterisk on the map below.

#### EUROPE

**UEFA Women's Nations League\***  
New competition that started in 2023 with 16 teams participating in the finals.

#### ASIA

**AFC Women's Asian Cup**  
Expanded competition that has had 12 teams competing since 2022.

**Women's Asian Games**  
Expanded competition with 16 teams participating since 2022.

#### AFRICA

**Women's Africa Cup of Nations**  
The 2024 edition has been delayed until 2025 due to scheduling clashes with the 2024 Paris Olympics.

#### OCEANIA

**OFC Women's Nations Cup**  
Expanded competition with 9 teams participating since 2022.



## Global

On a global level, the most impactful recent development is undoubtedly the expansion of the **FIFA Women's World Cup (FWWC)** from 24 to 32 teams. The first tournament with this format was the 2023 edition held in Australia and New Zealand. However, despite this increase in the number of participants, the minimum and maximum number of World Cup games a team could potentially play was unchanged as the competition structure has added two new groups as opposed to any additional rounds. The rationale for the change came as part of FIFA Women's Football Strategy and its commitment to "broadening the exposure of women's football and increasing its commercial value" as the tournament became the first edition to include national teams from all six confederations. This strategy, plus the player's contribution to the tournament's success meant that the 2023 edition generated USD 570 million.

A new global competition that launched in April 2023 was the **CONMEBOL/UEFA Women's Finalissima** which featured a one-off match between the winner of the 2022 Women's Euro and the 2022 Copa America Femenina. According to competition organisers, the match was organised as part of a "long-lasting collaboration between UEFA and CONMEBOL" and follows the men's version of the competition that was launched in June 2022.

From a scheduling perspective, from **2026 onwards**, FIFA has announced that the women's international calendar will be reduced from six to five windows (with the September windows being removed). However, to compensate for fewer international windows, the five remaining windows will be longer than their current iteration and will sometimes extend through weekends. Two new window types are being introduced (previously three types) with this reform. Type 1 lasts nine days and permits two national team matches to be played and Type 2 lasts 12 days and allows up to three games. International windows will be aligned across all confederations making it easier for teams to organise matches against other nations and allowing for a better rhythm to the match calendar overall for players.

## North & Central America and the Caribbean

In 2024, CONCACAF launched the **CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup** which took place in the United States. This new competition was played across 4 different venues with 12 teams playing a maximum of 6 matches. The motivation for the creation of this competition stems from the confederation's overall strategy to create more competitive opportunities for elite competition among women's teams in the region.

## Europe

In the 2023/24 season, Europe saw the launch of the **UEFA Women's Nations League** which had 51 teams participating in the league phase and 16 teams qualifying for the Finals that took place in February 2024. This format is set to be largely replicated in the 2025 edition of the competition with one key change: the semi-finals and the final will now be two-legged affairs instead of one.

## Asia

In Asia, there have been two different national team competitions that are undergoing reforms. Firstly, the **AFC Women's Asian Cup** in 2022 saw an expansion in the number of participating teams (from 8 to 12) and the maximum number of games a team can play (rising from 5 to 6).

Similarly, the **Women's Asian Games Football Tournament** also saw an increase in its number of participating teams, rising from 11 to 16. These expansions of national team competitions suggest the game's growth in the region.

## South America, Africa, and Oceania

Three regions that have seen minimal national competition changes in recent or upcoming times are South America, Africa, and Oceania. Starting with Oceania, which has only seen a slight competition change, in that there has been an increase in the number of participating teams in the 2022 edition of the **OFC Women's Nations Cup** (increasing from 8 to 9) with the maximum number of matches a team can play remaining unchanged.

Similarly, South America's only national team competition change came in 2022 when the **Copa America Femenina** changed its competition format, reducing the maximum number of games a team could play from 7 to 6.

Looking at Africa, there have been no recent or planned upcoming national team competition changes around the number of games or participating teams. However, on a scheduling note, the proposed 2024 edition of the **Women's African Cup of Nations** has been delayed until June 2025 due to its timing clash with the 2024 Paris Olympics. This scheduling conflict along with the minor competition changes in the Oceania and South America regions suggest that national team competition growth is not equitable among all regions as some see real development of the women's game whereas some could be seen as stagnating.

## Workload impact

The disproportionate expansion of national team competitions between regions means that match loads and travel loads will also differ between players from different regions. Looking at Europe, Asia and North & Central America and the Caribbean as examples, these regions have had at least one major competition reformatting or addition, over recent and upcoming seasons, which has increased the number of participating teams, or the maximum number of matches teams will play. This higher number of national team games will increase the workload burden as players will be required to travel more frequently to satisfy these expanded and new competitions.

In contrast, regions such as South America, Africa, and Oceania have not seen the same level of expansion. However, such a lack of competition development could also allude to general shortcomings in the overall football development pace of these regions, too.

Another important workload consideration of the national team competitions mentioned in this chapter is whether these competitions have a dual purpose - serving as a continental championship as well as a qualification pathway for the FWWC. Perhaps unsurprisingly, UEFA is the only confederation that has its own, standalone qualifying tournament. National teams from the other confederations currently earn their place via their continental championships: the AFC Women's Asian Cup, CAF Women's Africa Cup of Nations, CONCACAF W Championship, COMNEBOL Copa America Femenina, and OFC Women's Nations Cup.

The creation of standalone qualifying tournaments for confederations could increase the number of high-level, competitive matches that are available to their players and teams. Given that in some of these regions, players may face underload issues, new standalone qualifying tournaments may begin to address some match load disparities. Looking forward, the AFC has recently confirmed the launch of such a competition in the lead-up to the 2031 FWWC. While this is a sign of progress and may address some underload issues facing Asian players, this change in the calendar is still two FWWC cycles away.

## INTERNATIONAL CLUB COMPETITIONS

From an international club competition perspective, recent and upcoming competition changes have begun or are on the horizon. The world map visual depicts major international club competition changes with further explanations below. Similarly, to changes in national team competitions, international club competition expansions are more common in some regions than others, indicating that growth in the game is not balanced among all the regions.

Recently launched competitions and those that are already announced to start soon are marked with an asterisk on the map below.

**GLOBAL**  
**FIFA Women's Club World Cup\***  
**FIFA** A new competition set to start in 2026 with 16 teams participating (format still to be announced).

**CONCACAF**  
**N/C AMERICA**  
**CONCACAF W Champions Cup\***  
 New 10-team competition that started in 2024.

**NWSL x Liga MXF Summer Cup\***  
 New competition launched in 2024 between 20 teams from the NSWL (14 teams) and Liga MX Femenil (6 teams).

**-CONMEBOL-**  
**SOUTH AMERICA**  
 No major competition changes.

**EUROPE**  
**UEFA Women's Champions League**  
 Expanded competition format commencing in 2025/26. 18 teams will now be participating in the competition proper.

**UEFA Women's Second Club Competition (official name TBA)\***  
 New secondary level of European competition starting in 2025/26, which will have 16 teams in the competition proper.

**AFRICA**  
 No major competition changes.

**ASIA**  
**AFC Women's Champions League\***  
 A new 12 team competition created in 2024 in place of the cancelled AFC Women's Club Championship.

**OCEANIA**  
**OFC Women's Champions League\***  
 A new and recently expanded competition that had 8 teams competing in its 2024 edition.

## Global

On a global club competition level, perhaps the most relevant change is the introduction of the **FIFA Women's Club World Cup** ('FWCWC') which will launch in 2026 and will feature 16 teams. Despite the close proximity of the tournament, many details of the competition are still unknown including the exact competition structure, key sponsors and even the host nation of the competition.

## North & Central America and the Caribbean

The N/C America region has recently launched two new international club competitions that started in the second half of 2024. The most noteworthy change in the region was the launch of the **CONCACAF W Champions Cup** which started in August 2024. This almost season-long competition consists of 10 teams from the CONCACAF region playing a maximum of 6 matches each. The rationale for the launch of this new competition is for a variety of reasons but most pertinently is CONCACAF's overarching strategy to provide more playing opportunities and further promote the development of the game across the CONCACAF region.

The other competition that was recently launched is the **NWSL x Liga MXF Summer Cup**, a competition that consists of 20 teams (6 from Mexico and 14 from the US) and has teams playing a maximum of five games.

## Europe

On a European level, there have been planned international club competition alterations with the **UEFA Women's Champions League** ('UWCL') being expanded to 18 teams (from 16) from the 2025/26 season onwards. This will see the maximum number of games a team can play increasing from 11 to 13 as the competition moves away from the traditional multi-group format to the 'Swiss' single-group model.

Moreover, UEFA has also announced that the 2025-26 season will be the inaugural **UEFA Women's Second Club Competition** (the competition name is to be finalised). Although many details of this competition are still yet to be determined, it is already known that the competition will consist of 16 teams with a maximum of 8 games played by a team. The rationale for this second-tier competition is to allow 'more clubs to compete in Europe and provide further incentive for investment at domestic level'. Overall, these two competitions highlight a growth trend of women's football in the region and the desire for the game's development to be more widespread throughout Europe.

## Asia

In Asia, the most notable change to the international club competition landscape occurred when the AFC Women's Club Championship was replaced by the revamped **AFC Women's Champions League**. This new competition, which started in August 2024, features 12 teams (up from 8 in the previous competition) and has teams playing a maximum of 6 matches each (up from 4). The hope for this underlying expansion is to provide an opportunity for clubs to accelerate onto the regional and global stage.

## Oceania

A new competition that was created in 2023 and then expanded in 2024 is the **OFC Women's Champions League**. As the region's premier women's club football competition, the 2024 edition had 8 participating teams with a maximum of five games for each. Unlike other regions that have already had some level of established professional club international competition, the Oceania region is very much in its infancy in this regard and the launch of the OFC Women's Champions League is only the start of the region's women's football developmental journey.

## Africa and South America

Despite being two regions growing the popularity and success of women's football, Africa and South America have not had any international club competition format changes since the 2022/23 season, and neither have any announced for the future. This lack of competition development is a sign that international club competition growth is not equal between all the regions, as some are responding to the growing demand and others are seemingly overlooked from a growth and development perspective.

## Workload impact

Overall, it is clear that some regions do not see the same level of international club competition development as others. Taking the cases of *Europe* and *North & Central America and the Caribbean*, both regions have two major competition expansions and/or entirely new competitions being launched these years. While new competitions demonstrate and promote the growth of the game, they also add a workload burden for participating players as they will be required to play more games and spend more time travelling.

For example, the CONCACAF W Champions Cup will likely fill the "international club competition" gap CONCACAF-based players had in their match calendars for many years, providing them with higher quality challenges and playing time.

Comparatively, players playing in regions where there has been no or very limited international club competition development, such as *Africa and South America*, will not have the same increase in workload. However, unlike *Europe* and *North & Central America* which are experiencing meaningful competition reforms, *Africa and South America* are not seeing the same growth and this lack of competition development is a wider signal of disparity in football development between continents/confederations. Moreover, this disparity could potentially have another, long-term knock-on effect on the players, as resources and funds will likely continue to concentrate in football regions that are growing, leaving regions such as *Africa and South America* behind.

## DOMESTIC CLUB COMPETITIONS

In this section, a selection of nine domestic top division leagues are analysed. These leagues were chosen as they are often considered the most well-established leagues worldwide, attracting the best talent and the most coverage. Six of them are among the strongest domestic European leagues (based on UEFA coefficient), while the others are prominent representatives of the North American, South American, and Asian regions.

### Recent and upcoming changes in nine major domestic leagues

League	Competition Change Season	Competition Timing 2023/24 or 2023 Season	# of Participating Teams	Increase in # of Participating Teams	# of Max Possible Games (regular season only)	Increase in the # of Max Possible Games	League Ownership Type
Women's Super League (WSL)	N/a	Oct 2023 - May 2024	12	-	22	-	Independent (WPLL). Formerly owned by the FA.
Liga F	N/a	Sep 2023 - Jun 2024	16	-	30	-	Partly independent (LPFF) for commercial purposes and party federation (RFEF) for regulatory aspects
Serie A Femminile	2025/26	Sep 2023 - May 2024	12	+2	TBC	TBC	Federation
Frauen-Bundesliga	2025/26	Sep 2023 - May 2024	14	+2	TBC	TBC	Federation
Première Ligue	N/a	Sep 2023 - May 2024	12	-	22	-	Independent (LFFP). Formerly owned by the FFF
National Women's Soccer League (NWSL)	2024	Mar 2023 - Nov 2023	14	+2	29	4	Franchise
Brasileirão Feminino	N/a	Feb 2023 - Sep 2023	16	-	15	-	Federation
Damallsvenskan	2022	Mar 2023 - Nov 2023	14	+2	26	4	Federation
WE League	2024	Nov 2023 - May 2024	12	+1	22	2	Independent

## COMPETITION CHANGES EXPLAINED

### Germany: Frauen-Bundesliga

The German topflight announced a reformatting of the league in the 2025/26 season moving from a 12 to a 14-team league size. The new structure in terms of the number of games that will be played has not been announced as of the writing of this report. However, assuming that a standard league format is to continue, all competing teams could play an extra four league games (moving from 22 to 26).

### Italy: Serie A Femminile

Like the Frauen-Bundesliga, the Serie A Femminile announced a reformatting of the league in the 2025/26 season moving from a 10 to a 12-team league. The upcoming change will mean a return to the previous format as the league used to have 12 teams not before a reform in 2022/23 decreased its size.

### Japan: WE League

The WE League has recently expanded in the 2023/24 season with the number of teams increasing from 11 to 12. This growth has also meant the maximum number of matches a team can play (not including play-off matches) has risen from 20 to 22.

### Sweden: Damallsvenskan

Similarly, the Damallsvenskan changed its format from the 2022 season onwards, adding two more clubs (12 to 14) and four extra league matches for every team.

### USA: NWSL

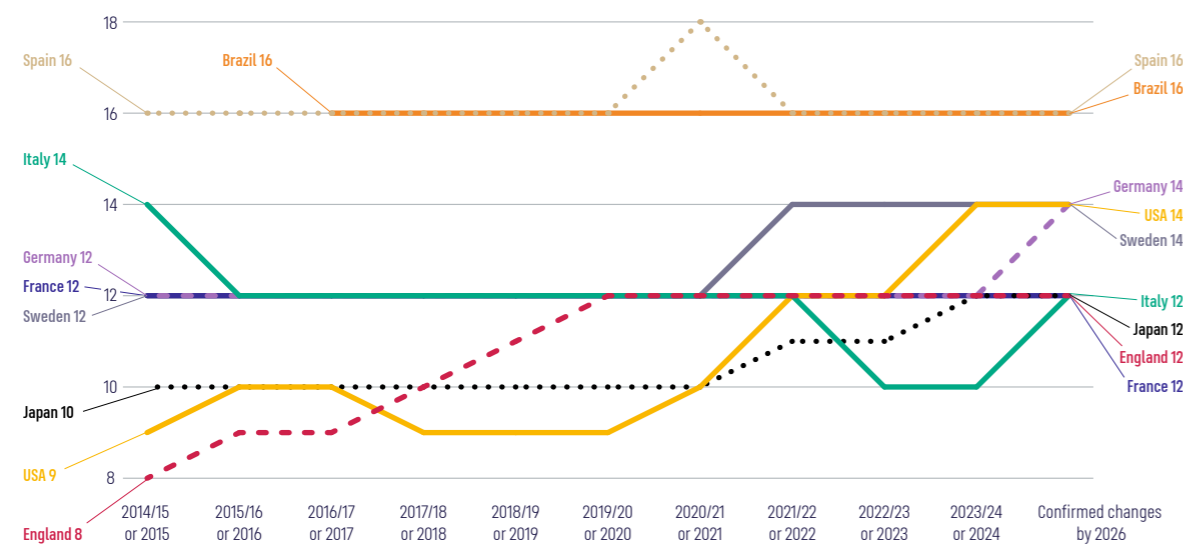
The NWSL in 2024 increased its number of teams from 12 to 14 with the maximum number of matches for a team rising from 25 to 29. However, unlike the rest of the assessed leagues, the NWSL has already announced plans for further expansion, with the league set to have 16 teams in what is suspected to be the 2026 season. The identity of the expansion franchises is yet to be decided.

### No competition changes

As has been indicated in the table, not all of the nine assessed major domestic leagues have had recent or will have competition changes. The WSL, Liga F, Première Ligue and Brasileirão Feminino all fall into this category. Regarding the WSL in England, although no official competition changes have been officially announced, there have been calls by various stakeholders that expansion should come as a result of the league's new ownership by the Women's Professional Leagues Limited (WPLL).



**Domestic growth – A long-term view**  
**Number of clubs in selected leagues over time**



*Note: the 2015 and 2016 seasons of the Brasileirão Feminino were excluded from this analysis as their league group stage format made them incomparable to other seasons.*

Over recent seasons and looking forward to upcoming changes, there is a clear trend developing across most of the selected top leagues. Most have already expanded recently or are in the process of welcoming new teams as part of a league size increase. Specifically, the Serie A Femminile, the Frauen-Bundesliga, National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), Damallsvenskan and the WE League all have confirmed competition expansions since 2022 with the NWSL already planning a further two-team expansion from 2026 onwards.

Of course, the pathway for increasing the size of these leagues is different with most having an open structure with relegation and promotion dictating which teams will be included in expanded leagues. However, leagues such as the NWSL and the A-League Women play under a franchise model which means any league expansion will require potential new teams to bid for one of the newly available spots. For example, the owners of Bay FC paid an expansion fee of USD 53 million for their right to join the NWSL league in the 2024 season.

This increase in league size has meant that some of the assessed leagues are also increasing the maximum number of games a team can potentially play each season. This has already happened in the US (+4 matches), Sweden (+4) and Japan (+2). It should be noted that while both the Serie A Femminile and Frauen-Bundesliga, have announced expansions, the new competition structures have not been confirmed yet.

Some of the assessed leagues have bucked the trend and have not recently grown in terms of the number of teams in the league despite growing their global audiences and revenues. A prime example of this is the English WSL which has stuck with a 12-team format since the 2019/20 season. However, there have been reports that league expansion will be coming and that 16 teams will be participating in the English topflight sometime in the near future. Conversely, Liga F actually reduced their number of teams in the 2021/2022 season from 18 to 16. This decrease reportedly was a result of the league's professionalisation and intention of increasing the overall sporting quality amongst its teams.

**In conclusion, all but one of the analysed nine leagues will have the same or more clubs in their ranks from 2025 onwards, a clear sign of the game's overall growth. As identified in this section, growth continues on an upward trajectory. However, what is critical is that growth is also matched with improvements in related infrastructure, safeguards, and general level of professionalisation to ensure that players play in environments that allow them to flourish.**

**MATCH LOAD PROJECTIONS**

The impact of recent and upcoming competition reforms (as discussed in the previous sections) could increase the overall match load of players while also changing the composition of their match calendar (domestic vs international games). However, the expectation is that this increase will not be uniform across everyone as those who are already involved in several different (international) competitions will be exposed to a greater level of match load increases compared to other player archetypes.

**The following analysis plots the theoretical maximum number of matches selected professional players in different competitions could play across six seasons.** The objective is to showcase how many matches they *could have* played in past seasons if their teams advanced to the finals of each competition and how many they could feature in if their teams go all the way in future seasons. In a sense, the analysis is about measuring access to competition and not the actual appearance figures.

The six chosen players are from the Spanish Liga F, the English WSL and the USA NWSL. Two players were needed from each league in order to simulate the impact of competition reforms on different player profiles and to showcase the level of disparity in playing opportunity and match load.

In each pairing, 'Player 1' belongs to a club that plays only in domestic competitions. Additionally, Player 1 does not have any national team commitments over the assessed period. Conversely, 'Player 2' is a regular in her club side that features in domestic and international competitions alike. On top of that, Player 2 is also an important member of her senior national team.

**The selected players are as follows:**

<p>League</p>	<p>Player 1</p> <p><b>LAURITA DOMÍNGUEZ</b></p>	<p>Player 2</p> <p><b>AITANA BONMATÍ</b></p>
<p>League</p>	<p>Player 1</p> <p><b>SARAH MAYLING</b></p>	<p>Player 2</p> <p><b>NIAMH CHARLES</b></p>
<p>League</p>	<p>Player 1</p> <p><b>LAUREN MILLIET</b></p>	<p>Player 2</p> <p><b>SOPHIA SMITH</b></p>

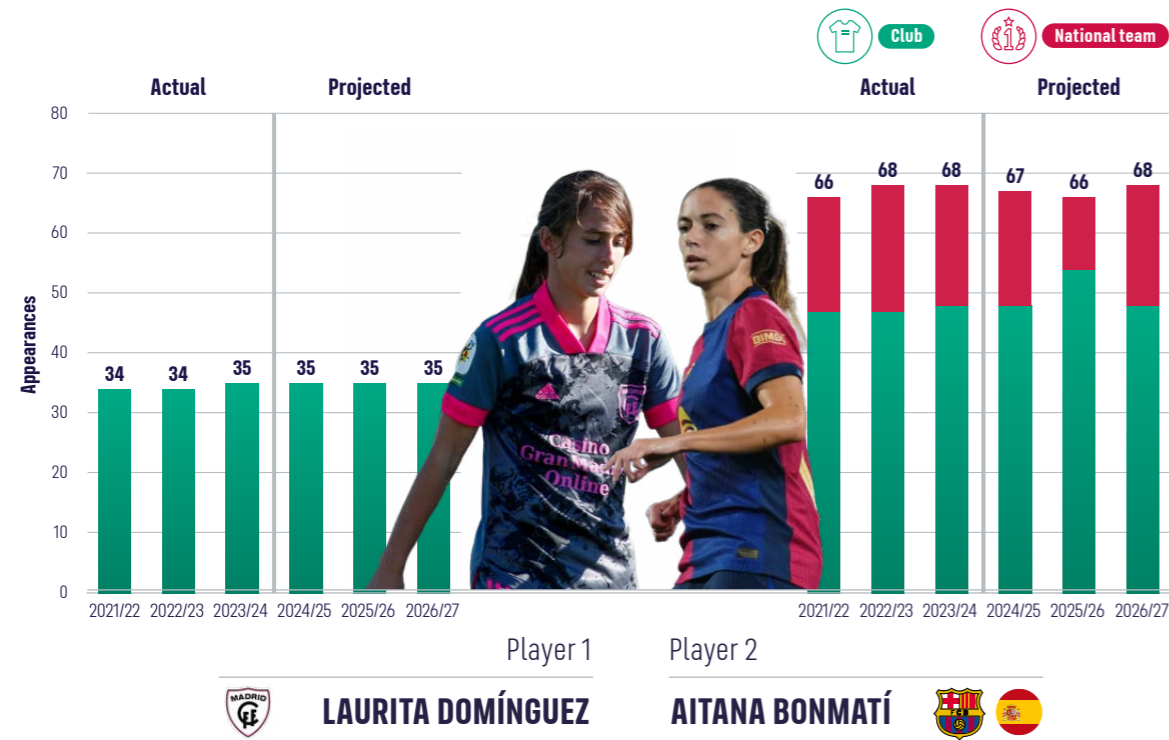
**Analysis assumptions**

In undertaking the analysis, a series of assumptions have been made to determine the projected theoretical maximum number of matches each player could play over the analysed period. Firstly, the assessed period includes the last three completed seasons (2021/22 - 2023/24 or 2022 - 2024 for the NWSL players) and the following three projected seasons (2024/25 - 2026/27 or 2025 - 2027 for the NWSL players). It was assumed that none of the analysed players will suffer a long-term injury and will thus theoretically be available for all matches of their teams. Another important assumption was that their clubs and national teams would continue to have on-pitch results similar to recent seasons so as to accurately project which competitions could each player feature in.

The following analyses will show the maximum number of matches for each of the above players by competition type and organiser.

## LIGA F: LAURITA DOMÍNGUEZ VS AITANA BONMATÍ

Theoretical maximum appearances - actual & projected: 2021/22 - 2026/27

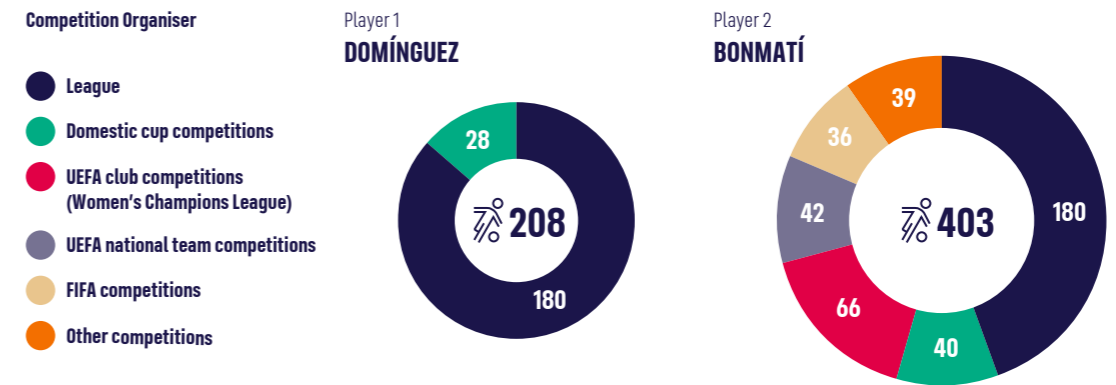


Our results show that Bonmatí already “had access” to a lot more playing time than Domínguez, especially due to international club and national team competitions. It is projected that as a result of recent and upcoming competition expansions mentioned earlier in this chapter (e.g. the UWCL or the FIFA Women's Club World Cup), that **the match load disparity between these two player archetypes will not be closing any time soon.**

Taking the example of the 2026/27 season, Bonmatí (or any other FC Barcelona player for that matter) could theoretically end up playing nearly twice as many games as Domínguez (68 vs 35). While this is only a simple projection, it indicates the disparity in workload for players; as some remain underloaded without access to competitive match opportunities and others, in the absence of necessary protections, may experience overload leading to an increased chance of injury.

In total, Bonmatí's access to matches stands at 403, while for Domínguez it is only 208 over the same six-season period, which is a considerable gap, all stemming from international games.

### Total theoretical maximum appearances by competition organiser (2021/22 - 2026/27, six-season total)



When breaking down each player's maximum appearances by competition organiser, it becomes evident why Bonmatí's workload has - and will continue to be - comparatively higher compared to Domínguez. Both players could play a similar number of domestic club matches across Liga F and domestic cups but **what really separates the two players is the number of potential games in international cups and in a national team setting.**

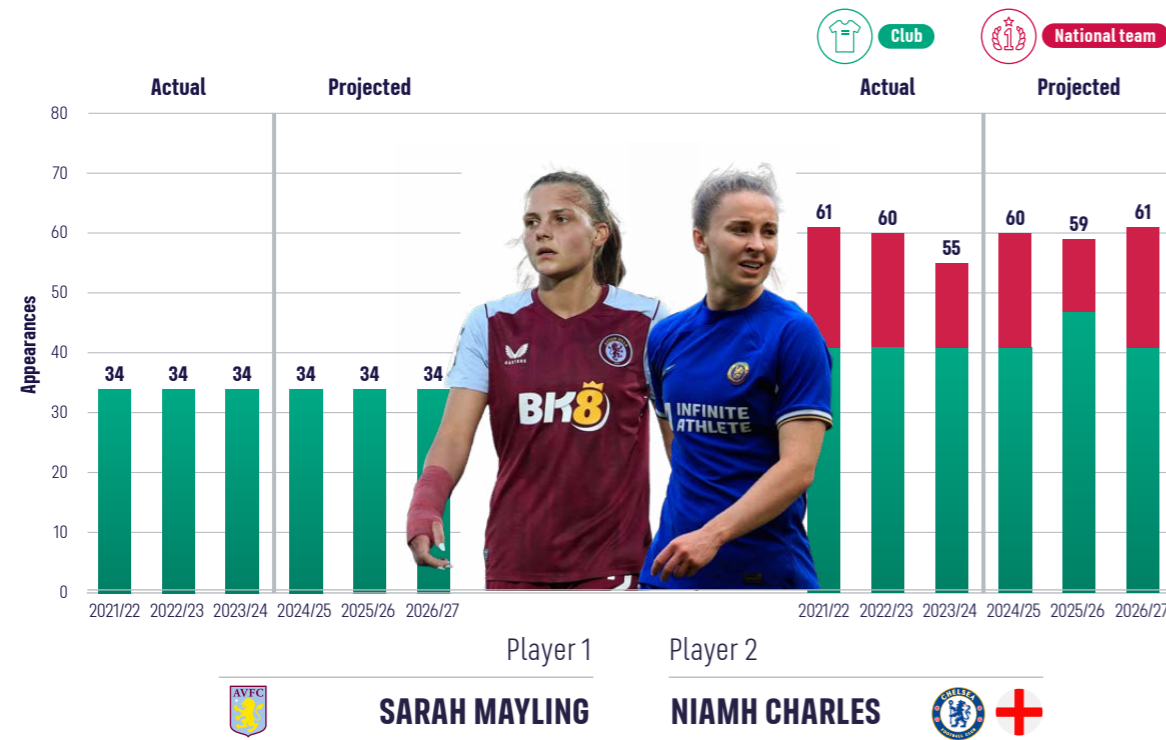
Bonmatí, over the assessed period, is projected to have 36% of her total matches coming from either FIFA or UEFA organised competitions such as the FIFA Women's Club World Cup or the UEFA Women's Nations League. Moreover, when including 'other competitions' such as national team friendlies or invitational tournaments, this proportion jumps to 45%.

The high workload Bonmatí faces is a stark contrast to Domínguez, whose lack of national team matches for Spain and no club international matches with Madrid CFF means that she is likely to experience underload in certain periods of a season. The match load disparity between the two players is emblematic of a wider problem in the women's game as top players are required to play in a considerably higher number of matches across numerous competitions and regions, whereas many other players will only be afforded the opportunity to play in their domestic league and cup competition matches.



# WSL: SARAH MAYLING VS NIAMH CHARLES

Theoretical maximum appearances - actual & projected: 2021/22 - 2026/27

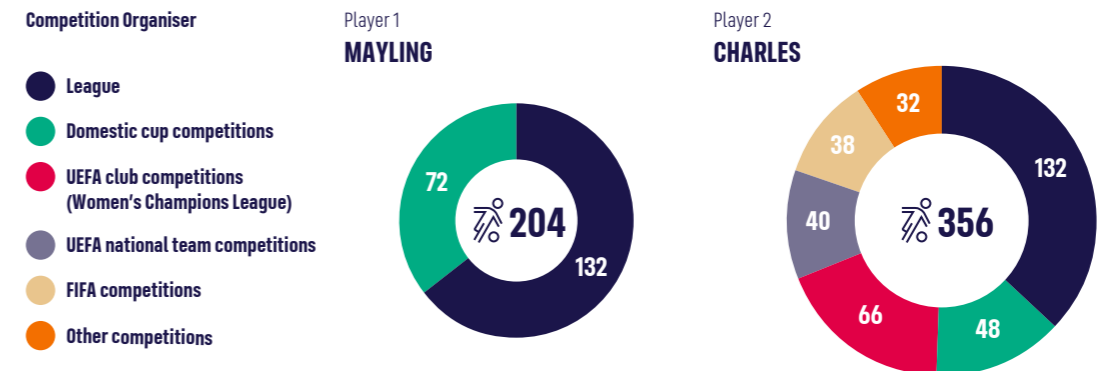


Not dissimilar to their Spanish counterparts, the two selected WSL players also have a similar level of **disparity between them when it comes to their recent and projected access to playing time**. This disparity has arisen due to Charles being afforded the opportunity to play in various international club and national team competitions as part of the Chelsea FC and the English national team squads.

Mayling's 2026/27 season is projected to mirror her recent seasons as she is expected to play a maximum of only 34 league and domestic cup matches for Aston Villa FC. At nearly double that amount, Charles, across her club and senior national team sides is expected to theoretically end up playing 61 matches. This gulf in match load (and travel load) underlines a dual issue: some players remain underloaded without access to competitive match opportunities whereas others might face overload challenges.

In summation, Charles (356), across the six-season analysis period, will have access to 152 more matches than Mayling (204).

## Total theoretical maximum appearances by competition organiser (2021/22 - 2026/27, six-season total)



The access to WSL and domestic cup matches, over a six-season total is not hugely different between Charles and Mayling. The **gap between the players' opportunity for playing time mostly arises when it comes to international matches, both in terms of club internationals and senior national team competitions**.

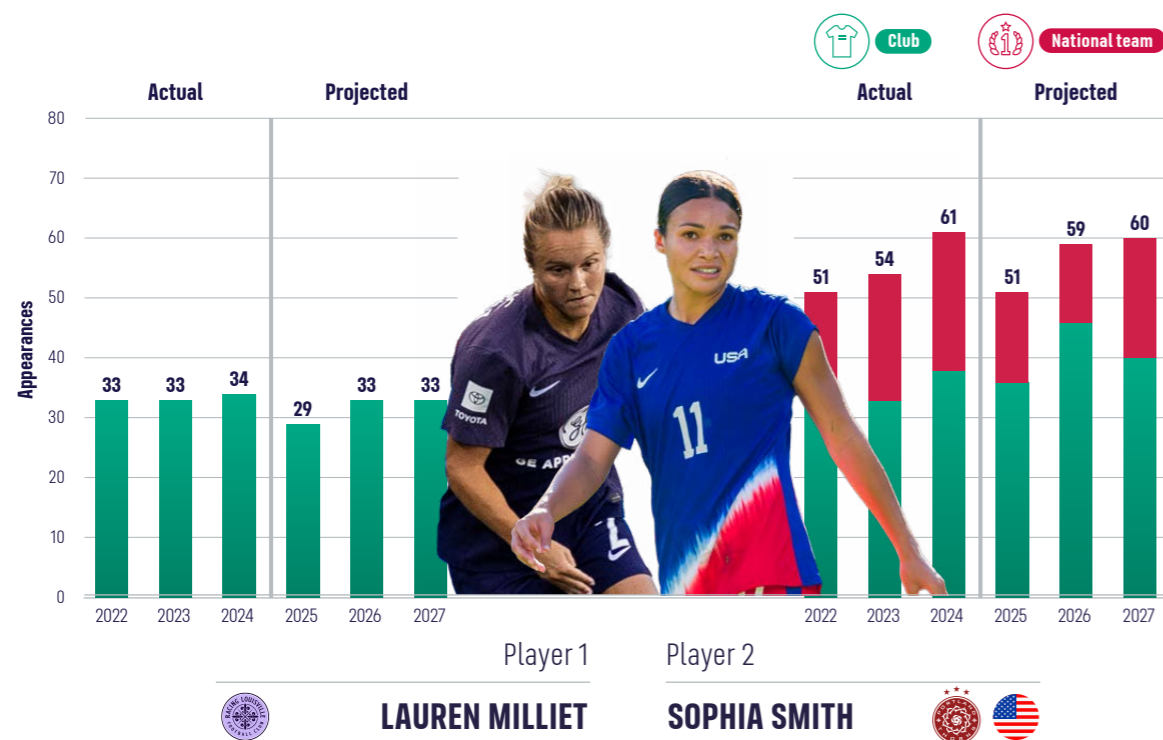
What stands out from the above analysis is that due to the unique format of the FA Women's League Cup, Mayling could have access to more domestic club matches than Charles (72 vs 48 games). English teams that are also involved in the UEFA Women's Champions League group stage join at the quarter-finals stage of the League Cup, which means that Chelsea FC's games in this competition are generally limited.

Crucially though, even the 24-game difference in domestic cup competitions is insufficient to bridge the overall match load gap between the two analysed players.



# NWSL: LAUREN MILLIET VS SOPHIA SMITH

Theoretical maximum appearances - actual & projected: 2022 - 2027

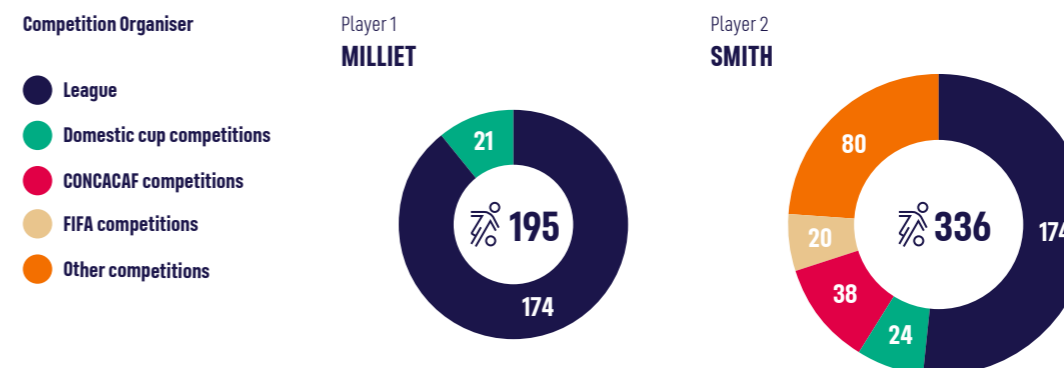


Looking at our two selected United States players, Smith is expected to have more playing time opportunity compared to her NWSL counterpart, Milliet. This type of imbalance, like our prior player pairings, comes off the back of Milliet being expected to play only in domestic competitions, whereas Smith will likely feature in domestic club, international club and senior national competitions, as well. **This match load contrast between these two NWSL players is exacerbated by competition reforms** such as the introduction of the CONCACAF W Gold Cup and the FIFA Women's Club World Cup.

To showcase this point, a Portland Thorns FC player who is also a regular for the USWNT, such as Smith, could theoretically end up playing in nearly twice as many games over the course of the 2027 season as an NWSL player who only has access to domestic matches (60 vs 33 appearances). The peak seasons, in terms of Smith's potential appearances, come when she features in major club and/or national team tournaments; the Paris Olympics in 2024, the FIFA Women's Club World Cup in 2026 and the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023 and 2027.

Overall, across the six-season period, Smith will likely have access to 336 matches, while for Milliet the maximum total is just 195.

## Total theoretical maximum appearances by competition organiser (2022 - 2027, six-season total)



When looking at each player's potential appearances by competition organiser over the six-season period, the drivers of the workload disparity become clear. While Milliet and Smith will have a similar maximum number of domestic club appearances, the latter's match load also includes several CONCACAF and FIFA competitions on top of that: 17% of her potential total match load falls into this category and includes tournaments such as the CONCACAF W Championship and the FIFA Women's Club World Cup.

The difference in the number of total matches for Smith and Milliet highlights a common problem in today's game. The high-usage player with a heavy international match load could face physical and mental fatigue as well as a heightened risk of injury due to the packed calendar, while the other player might have to contend with underload and the lack of consistent game time.

Finally, it should be noted that Smith has a significant proportion (24%) of her potential matches labelled as 'other competitions'. One of the main contributors to this category are national team friendlies. As the CONCACAF confederation does not have a standalone Women's World Cup qualifying competition, more windows are available for friendlies for them than in the case of the European players analysed in the previous two examples.





# 06

## EVOLUTION OF COMPETITIVE BALANCE ACROSS TOP FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS

It has been argued that the competition landscape has at times lacked balance and there is a growing perception that a few dominant teams could increasingly make football matches rather predictable. However, is that really the case? This section looks at ten prominent competitions in women's football and assesses their competitive balance over the last decade to determine what various reforms and the overall growth of the game have led to on the pitch.



# 06

## EVOLUTION OF COMPETITIVE BALANCE ACROSS TOP FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

#### AT A GLANCE – CHAPTER 06

- » Competitive balance is important when assessing the general appeal of a league and the distribution of quality between its participants.
- » Partially due to the closed franchise system, the NWSL was found to be the most balanced when compared to other assessed top competitions across most measures.
- » The “usual suspects” often prevail; many leagues only have two or three clubs with a genuine chance of winning the title.

### INTRODUCTION

Competitive balance in a sporting context refers to the distribution of quality between the teams within a competition. If there is a great imbalance between the participating teams, then the spectacle could soon become predictable, hurting commercial and growth prospects alike. Moreover, competitive imbalance implies that a small number of teams in a league have a higher likelihood of sporting success with all the other teams having less probability of success.

In women’s football, we have seen a few dominant teams in several competitions in recent years that won most of their matches due to their superiority of talent and financial resources. In this chapter, we have assessed the competitive balance within ten different competitions over the last decade and then looked at the impact of various reforms or league size changes. The selection includes nine first-division domestic leagues from around the world, as well as the UEFA Women’s Champions League, the premier international club competition in Europe. They were chosen for this analysis assessment as they are generally considered the most well-established club competitions in women’s football. The selection of leagues is as follows:

-  England – Women’s Super League (WSL)
-  Spain – Liga F
-  Italy – Serie A Femminile
-  Germany – Frauen-Bundesliga
-  France – Première Ligue
-  United States – National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL)
-  Sweden – Damallsvenskan
-  Brazil – Brasileirão Feminino
-  Japan – WE League
-  Europe – UEFA Women’s Champions Leagues

The assessment only factors in the regular league seasons (without league play-offs or finals series) to create consistency between the leagues.

It should also be noted that some seasons are missing from the analysis due to a variety of reasons. For example, the 2020 NSWL season was not assessed as it was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the Brasileirão Feminino’s league structure before the 2019 season was unusual as it divided teams into two or four groups for the majority of the campaign. This made it necessary to exclude Brazil’s 2015-2018 period from some of the analysis. Moreover, two adjustments had to be made in the case of the UWCL 1) we considered only the “competition proper” (group stage and beyond) and 2) since the UWCL partially utilises a knock-out tournament format, metrics based on points won were not applicable to it (see season-level competitive balance measures).

Lastly, it must be noted that the analysis of the FA WSL Spring Series that took place in 2017 had to be excluded. This competition was introduced to bridge the gap between the 2016 and 2017/18 seasons of the English first division as it switched from a calendar year type schedule to the fall-spring schedule that is more common in European football. Similarly, no values are shown for the “2020/21 or 2021” season of the Japanese WE League in our analysis because that competition also changed its scheduling between seasons. This practically meant that there were no matches played in the top tier of women’s football in the country for roughly 10 months between November 2020 and September 2021.

### MATCH-LEVEL COMPETITIVE BALANCE METRICS

#### Metric 1 – Average goal difference

Of the assessed competitions, the UWCL had the greatest goal difference between teams over the past decade

Assessing the average goal difference (or margin of victory) across all games played in a season is a useful indicator of the competitive balance of a competition as it depicts the general closeness of matches. If several teams routinely win their matches by multiple goals, then that is bound to have an impact on the metric. Conversely, if teams are close to each other in quality, it should lead to a lower average goal difference in their encounters.

The table summarizes the average goal difference of the last 10 seasons for all assessed competitions. Each season is colour-coded based on their defined goal difference category.

CATEGORIES											
RANGE	DESCRIPTION										
≤ 1.5	Minimal Avg. Margin of Victory										
1.5-2	Low Avg. Margin of Victory										
2-2.5	Medium Avg. Margin of Victory										
≥ 2.5	High Avg. Margin of Victory										

COMPETITION		SEASON									
REGION	COMPETITION	2014/15 or 2015	2015/16 or 2016	2016/17 or 2017	2017/18 or 2018	2018/19 or 2019	2019/20 or 2020	2020/21 or 2021	2021/22 or 2022	2022/23 or 2023	2023/24 or 2024
England	Women’s Super League	1.57	1.75	N/A	2.18	1.97	1.85	2.14	2.09	1.96	1.84
Spain	Liga F	1.77	1.99	1.97	1.70	1.79	1.72	1.74	1.93	1.87	1.83
Italy	Serie A Femminile	2.24	2.42	2.33	2.02	2.15	1.93	1.91	1.94	1.79	1.66
Germany	Frauen-Bundesliga	2.16	2.07	1.81	2.23	2.64	2.44	2.24	2.31	2.22	1.94
France	Première Ligue	3.21	2.67	2.48	2.02	2.08	2.42	2.33	2.30	1.95	1.92
USA	National Women’s Soccer League	1.21	1.31	1.27	1.26	1.33	N/A	1.28	1.28	1.22	1.32
Brazil	Brasileirão Feminino	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.20	2.41	1.42	1.65	2.25	1.57
Sweden	Damallsvenskan	1.76	1.65	1.42	1.77	1.69	1.67	1.63	1.87	1.90	1.95
Japan	WE League	1.40	1.74	1.50	1.63	1.46	1.46	N/A	1.27	1.35	1.36
Europe	UEFA Women’s Champions League	2.46	2.28	2.18	2.48	2.49	2.80	2.43	2.72	2.30	1.70

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

The WSL and Damallsvenskan, compared to the first five analysed seasons, have both seen an increase in the average goal difference (or margin of victory) since 2020, likely due to the growing financial disparity and fragmented levels of professionalisation between various tiers of their teams. However, it should be noted that the rise in the average goal difference in these leagues can also be attributed to the increasing number of teams in each league over the assessed period (see Chapter 05) which might have led to a greater talent imbalance between top and bottom teams.

On the other side of the spectrum, the Serie A Femminile, Première Ligue, Brasileirão Feminino and WE League have all recorded a decrease in this metric over the last 10 seasons.

Five of the assessed competition and season pairs had an average goal difference above 2.5 goals. Two of these cases occurred in Première Ligue, while there were two in the UWCL and one in the Frauen-Bundesliga.

Interestingly, the UWCL, a competition that is intended to have Europe’s elite club teams competing against one another showcased the highest average goal difference across the 10 seasons (2.38 goal difference in an average season). This level of disparity is due to the difference in the level of professionalism and resources between the top teams competing such as FC Barcelona, Olympique Lyonnais, Chelsea, and the rest. To emphasise this point, we found that matches featuring FC Barcelona in the UWCL in the last 10 seasons had an average goal difference of 2.49 goals. Admittedly, most of these games were won by the Blaugrana, who were UWCL champions in 2021, 2023, and 2024. Meanwhile, the same metric for Olympique Lyonnais (six-time winners over the last 10 seasons) was even higher, standing at 2.99 goals.

**Metric 2 - Number of "blow-out" victories**

The UWCL has had the most 'blow-out' victories per 10 matches, while the NWSL has had the fewest.

A critique of the women's game is the frequency of 'blow-out' victories by teams with greater financial investment and resources that allow them to afford the best players and provide the best training and playing environment for them to thrive. To assess the selected women's competitions across 10 seasons and provide a consistent approach, a 'blow-out' victory was defined as a margin of four goals or more. Additionally, as our benchmarked competitions often featured a different number of teams and matches, we opted to use the number of 'blow-out' victories per every ten games as opposed to the total figure. Hence, variations in league size do not have a significant effect on the results. It should be noted that leagues with more teams will typically have a bigger talent gap between top and bottom teams and thus league size changes can slightly affect the below findings.

CATEGORIES	
RANGE	DESCRIPTION
≤ 1.5	1.5 or fewer blow-out victories per 10 matches
1.5-2	Between 1.5 and 2 blow-out games
2-2.5	Between 2 and 2.5 blow-out games
≥ 2.5	2.5 or more blow-out victories per 10 matches

REGION	COMPETITION	SEASON										Average
		2014/15 or 2015/16 or 2015	2015/16 or 2016	2016/17 or 2017	2017/18 or 2018	2018/19 or 2019	2019/20 or 2020	2020/21 or 2021	2021/22 or 2022	2022/23 or 2023	2023/24 or 2024	
England	Women's Super League	1.07	2.14	N/A	1.89	2.00	1.26	2.42	2.12	1.82	1.52	1.81
Spain	Liga F	1.25	1.75	1.71	1.04	1.25	1.25	1.18	1.54	1.71	1.38	1.41
Italy	Serie A Femminile	2.20	2.58	2.27	1.82	1.89	1.37	1.44	1.44	1.44	1.00	1.75
Germany	Frauen-Bundesliga	2.27	1.89	1.21	2.12	2.95	2.80	2.12	2.58	2.27	1.52	2.17
France	Première Ligue	3.71	2.65	2.42	2.05	1.97	2.29	2.35	2.27	1.52	1.89	2.31
USA	National Women's Soccer League	0.22	0.40	0.42	0.56	0.46	N/A	0.42	0.68	0.38	0.27	0.42
Brazil	Brasileirão Feminino	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.17	2.17	0.83	1.08	1.50	1.33	1.51
Sweden	Damallsvenskan	1.44	1.21	0.76	1.14	1.14	0.91	1.06	1.32	1.54	1.65	1.22
Japan	WE League	0.56	1.22	0.78	1.11	0.78	0.89	N/A	0.36	0.55	0.38	0.74
Europe	UEFA Women's Champions League	2.62	2.13	1.80	2.30	2.62	3.09	1.97	3.77	2.79	1.15	2.42

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

On average, the Frauen-Bundesliga (2.2), the Première Ligue (2.3) and the UWCL (2.4) had the highest incidence of 'blow-out' victories with all three having more than two out of every 10 games played. Comparatively, the NWSL (0.4) and the WE League (0.7) had the lowest number of such games across the 10-season period, perhaps suggesting a more equitable distribution of talent compared to other benchmarked leagues.

In terms of the individual seasons with the highest share of 'blow-out' victories, the UWCL (2021/22) takes the crown with 3.77 out of every 10 games. One of the highlights was the 7-0 defeat of Servette Chênois at the hands of Chelsea FC. When only looking at domestic competitions, the Première Ligue (2014/15) had the highest rate at 3.71. This figure was largely a result of the dominant positions of Lyon and PSG; they recorded a staggering +114 and +79 goal difference by the end of the campaign, respectively. This is especially noteworthy given that teams only played 22 league games that season in the French top tier. This lack of competitive balance can be explained by the comparative level of historical investment for these two French giants compared to the rest of the league.

The fewest number of 'blow-out' victories in a season belongs to 2015 in the NWSL: there were just two such games in the entire season (a 4-0 victory for FC Kansas City and a 5-1 victory for Seattle Reign; on both occasions the Western New York Flash was on the losing side).

There is no clear, overarching trend in this metric that would apply to all analysed competitions. The French Première Ligue has shown the most significant reduction in this metric whereas the WSL has shown the biggest increase over the assessed period.

**SEASON-LEVEL COMPETITIVE BALANCE METRICS**

**Metric 1 - Gini coefficient**

The NWSL has the lowest Gini coefficient (0.16) of all assessed competitions suggesting a greater level of sporting performance equality between competing teams.

One established way of measuring competitive balance is via the Gini coefficient ("Gini"), which is an economic measure of statistical variation within a sample. In other words, it measures how equal or unequal a set of results are with a score of 0 being considered 'perfectly equal' and a score of 1 being considered 'perfectly unequal'.

REGION	COMPETITION	SEASON										Average
		2014/15 or 2015	2015/16 or 2016	2016/17 or 2017	2017/18 or 2018	2018/19 or 2019	2019/20 or 2020	2020/21 or 2021	2021/22 or 2022	2022/23 or 2023	2023/24 or 2024	
England	Women's Super League	0.24	0.33	N/A	0.27	0.31	0.31	0.29	0.26	0.28	0.29	0.29
Spain	Liga F	0.25	0.27	0.26	0.21	0.23	0.25	0.23	0.25	0.25	0.26	0.24
Italy	Serie A Femminile	0.28	0.27	0.30	0.28	0.28	0.31	0.31	0.29	0.29	0.31	0.29
Germany	Frauen-Bundesliga	0.29	0.22	0.30	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.31	0.30	0.27	0.28
France	Première Ligue	0.19	0.18	0.28	0.26	0.25	0.33	0.29	0.31	0.29	0.26	0.26
USA	National Women's Soccer League	0.15	0.17	0.17	0.24	0.17	N/A	0.14	0.15	0.07	0.21	0.16
Brazil	Brasileirão Feminino	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.29	0.29	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.25	0.27
Sweden	Damallsvenskan	0.26	0.27	0.18	0.20	0.24	0.21	0.21	0.28	0.27	0.28	0.24
Japan	WE League	0.28	0.24	0.25	0.25	0.21	0.21	N/A	0.24	0.23	0.24	0.24

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

As explained in the introduction, the UWCL is not part of the season-level analysis, so from here on only nine domestic competitions are compared to each other. The Gini coefficient results depict the NWSL as more balanced than all other assessed domestic leagues, despite a relatively "imbalanced" 2024 regular season. This level of balance likely stems from equitable talent distribution across the league and a revenue sharing model which is a component of creating uniformity across team spend. The lack of a promotion-relegation system also means that the promotion of a significantly weaker club from a lower division cannot increase the imbalance either. It should also be noted that the NWSL was the most balanced league when considering match-level metrics in the previous section; no surprise then that this translates to a more balanced final league table at the end of the season, as well.

However, some of the analysed leagues show signs of becoming increasingly unequal since the start of the assessed period e.g. the WSL, the Première Ligue and the Serie A Femminile. This could be the impact of growing financial and - consequently - talent disparity between teams. The clubs with more resources (often those that are traditionally well resourced in men's football and who commit to resourcing their women's team well) can acquire and keep hold of better sporting talent and can also build on a potentially larger fanbase.

Notably, some of the leagues showed little sign of competitive balance changes in terms of Gini coefficient. The Spanish and Swedish first divisions are almost the same now as they were ten seasons ago; even during the in-between season, there was little variation in their respective Gini coefficient.

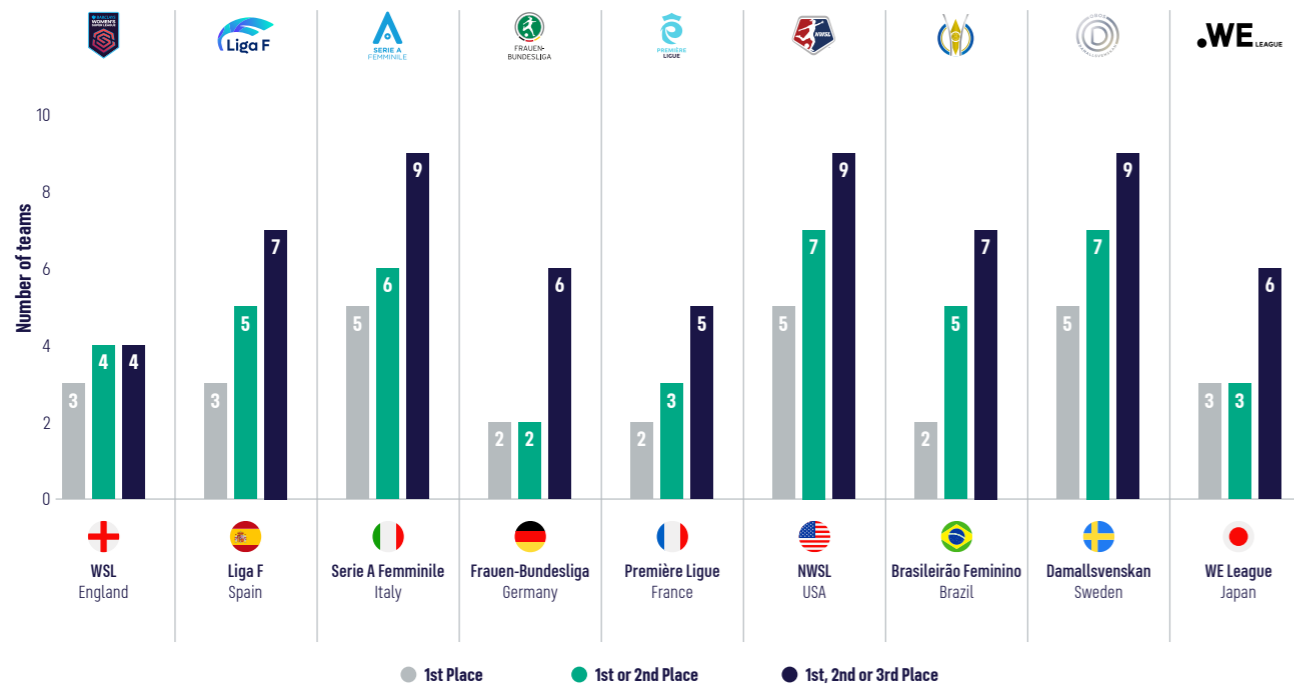
### Metric 2 - Number of unique teams finishing at the top of the league table

The Frauen-Bundesliga has only had two unique teams (Bayern München and Wolfsburg) finishing in its top two placings over the last 10 seasons.

One competitive balance measure often raised by football stakeholders is the lack of variety in the identity of league champions and those finishing near the top of the table. After all, if a limited set of clubs are so advanced compared to the rest that they are always expected to finish on the podium, then it can be discouraging for investment and talent acquisition.

Note that in the case of leagues employing a playoff phase to determine who wins the title (e.g., NWSL), the standings at the end of the *regular* season were considered.

### Number of unique teams finishing 1st, 2nd or 3rd across 10 seasons



Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

When looking at how many different clubs finished in the first three places in the analysed nine domestic leagues, we found that the English WSL had the fewest (4) teams with at least one top-three finish since the 2014/15 season. Conversely, the Serie A Femminile, NWSL and the Damallsvenskan had the highest number of unique teams (9) finish on the podium.

Focusing only on the champions, the Frauen-Bundesliga, the Première Ligue and the Brasileirão Feminino have had the fewest different league winners over the last 10 seasons with two each. It should be noted that the Brasileirão Feminino results are somewhat distorted as the first four assessed seasons (2015-2018) were excluded from the analysis due to the previously mentioned unique competition structure that was in place in the first division at the time.

In terms of recent seasons, FC Barcelona (Liga F) and Chelsea FC (WSL) have had the longest streak of consecutive championships with both winning their domestic leagues in all of the past five seasons. Even though the Spanish top division was not among the most unequal leagues based on their Gini coefficient, that was more of the product of every other team's performance; in most seasons there was little doubt that FC Barcelona would finish on top.

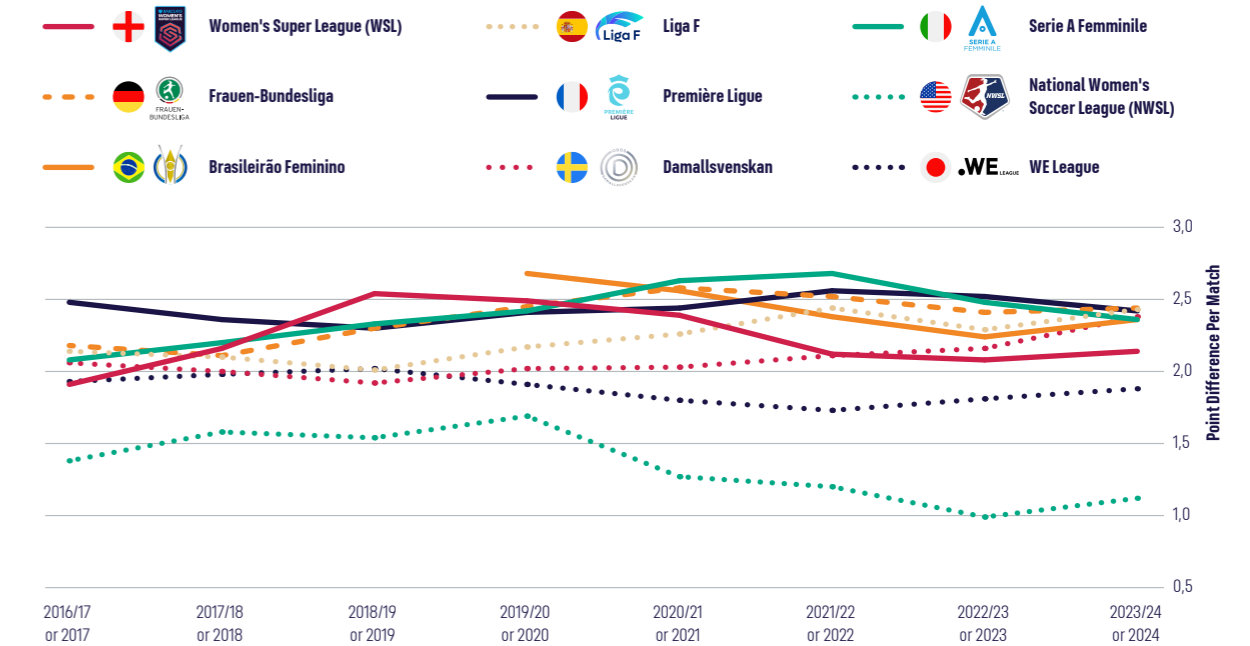
### Metric 3 - Point difference between first and last place (3-season rolling average)

The NWSL has consistently had a smaller gap between its first and last placed teams than any other analysed league

Finally, a fairly simple but insightful measure of competitive balance is the point difference between teams finishing at the top and at the bottom of the league table. To ensure that results aren't skewed by an abnormally strong or poor performance from a single team, a 3-season rolling average was used. For example, the value for the 2023/24 season on the chart is in fact the average of the 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 seasons. As a result, the chart starts from the 2016/17 season which encompasses the two preceding seasons, as well, in the form of the rolling average.

Additionally, as each of the nine leagues had a varied number of participating teams, the point difference between the first and last-placed teams was divided by the number of matches a team played during the season. This led to the 'point difference per match' metric, ensuring that the impact of league size on the findings was alleviated.

### Point difference between first and last place (3-season rolling average) across 10 seasons



Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

Similar to other competitive balance metrics mentioned earlier, the NWSL demonstrated a greater level of competitive balance than the other leagues. Generally, the regular season tables were quite tightly packed; the most extreme individual season was 2023 in which only 13 points separated the San Diego Wave and the Chicago Red Stars at the end of the regular season. As discussed previously, this relative level of competitive balance stems from the NWSL's franchise model system which allows more equity within the league between teams and the CBA - agreed upon between the NWSL and the NWSLPA - which stipulates that revenue sharing and minimum spends which are concepts that foster competitiveness within the league.

When excluding the NWSL (a traditional franchise model league), the Japanese WE League, generally had the lowest difference in points per match between the first and last placed teams, ranging between 1.7 and 2.0 points per match across the assessed period. By contrast, the Première Ligue had the highest per match point difference, ranging from 2.3 to 2.6.

# 07

## INDIVIDUAL PLAYER WORKLOAD JOURNEYS

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After several club and league level assessment, the following chapter goes one step further, highlighting individual workload stories from various leagues and shedding light on diverse situations within the women's game. By utilizing the workload metrics of the PWM platform, it becomes clear that even at the top of the game, players face different challenges.



# 07 / INDIVIDUAL PLAYER WORKLOAD JOURNEYS

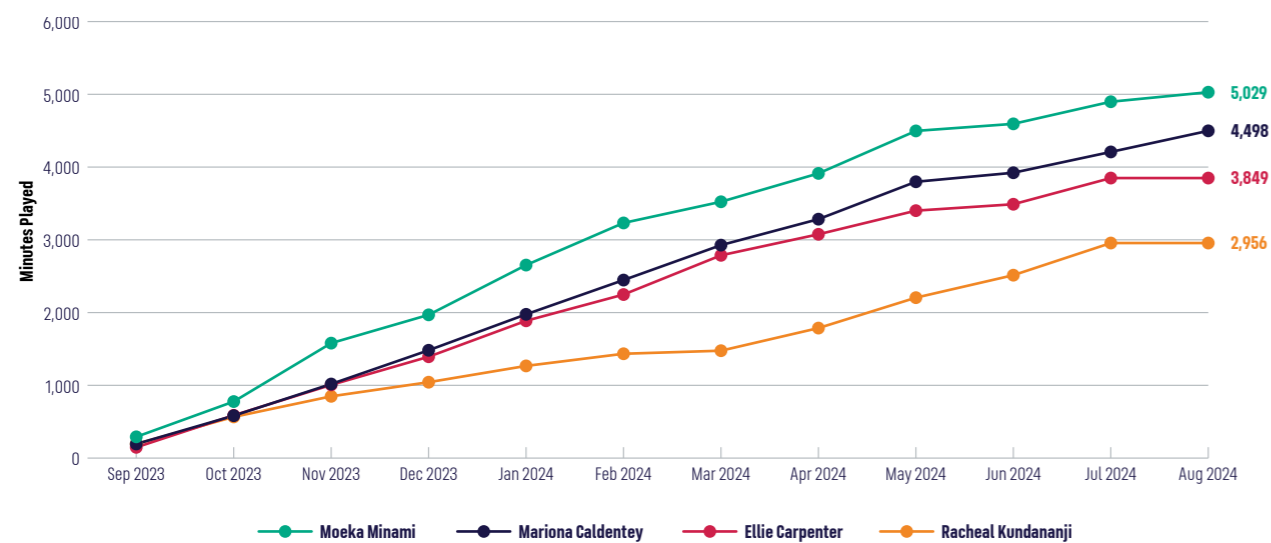
## INTRODUCTION

Club and national team requirements in women's football can create varied workload journeys for players. This variation can be quite significant and therefore this chapter aims to showcase the recent experiences of four players from a workload perspective up until the end of the 2024 Paris Olympics.

When selecting the players for this chapter, it was important to identify those who have important roles in different leagues and national teams to see how these factors can affect their overall workload. In the end, the data showed that the four players (Moeka Minami, Mariona Caldentey, Ellie Carpenter and Racheal Kundananji) had different match load experiences over the course of the 2023/24 season.

In the remainder of the chapter the individual workload statistics of the four players are analysed in detail, describing their 12-month period with largely the same set of workload metrics. In addition, there is a section for each of them that highlights a different angle and workload topic via their example.

### Evolution of cumulative minutes played in 2023/24



Note: figures for each month show the cumulative minutes of the player across the season up until the start of that month.



# MARIONA CALDENTEY

## Analysed period:

21st August 2023 – 10th August 2024



Spain



DOB: 19/03/1996

Left Winger

Caldentey had an illustrious 2023/24 campaign achieving club and national team honours. As part of the successful on-field season, Caldentey accumulated an astonishing 46 appearances for FC Barcelona and 18 for La Roja. Her success has resulted in a high-profile transfer to Arsenal in the 2024/25 season.

## Match load

Total appearances in period



Total minutes played in period

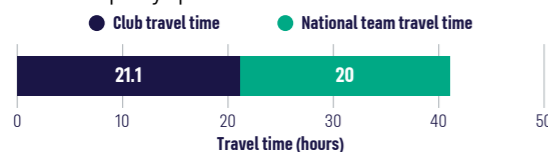


Percentage of back-to-back games in period



## Travel load

During the 2023/24 season, including the 2024 Paris Olympics, Caldentey accumulated over 41 hours of international travel, almost equally split between club and national team duties.



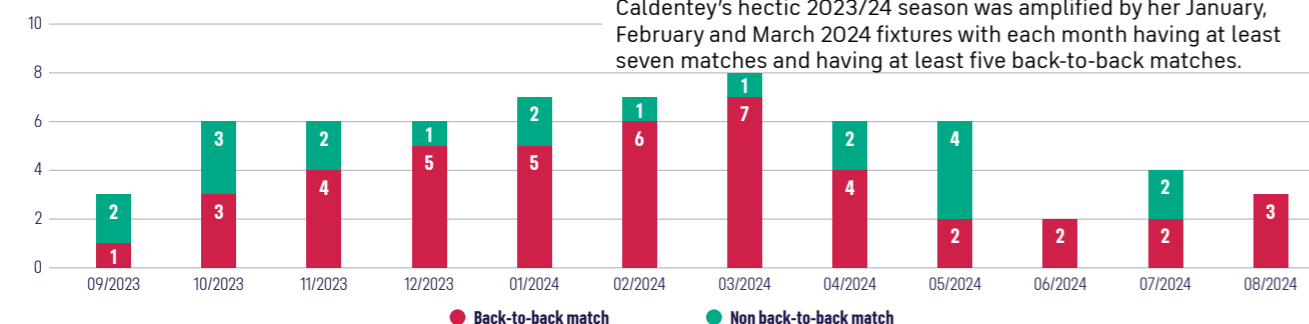
## Post-Olympic return to club

From her last game of the 2023/24 season and her reporting date to her new club side (Arsenal) pre-season training, Caldentey only received 10 days of rest.

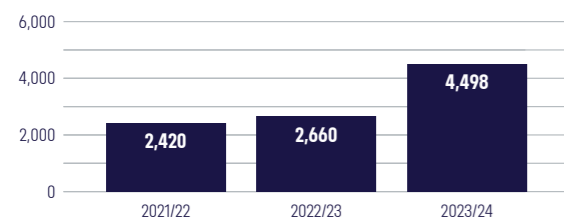


## Number of back-to-back appearances by month

Caldentey's hectic 2023/24 season was amplified by her January, February and March 2024 fixtures with each month having at least seven matches and having at least five back-to-back matches.

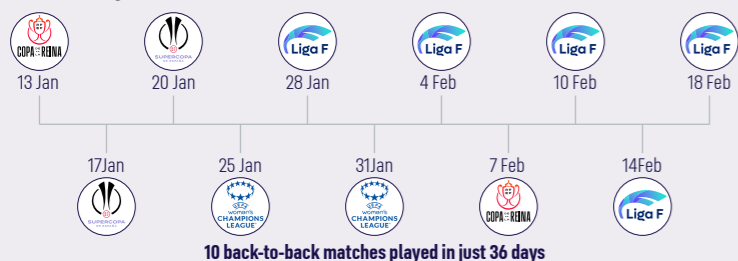


## Overview of the last three full seasons (minutes)



The 2023/24 season was a huge step up in terms of accumulated minutes across total club and national team compared to previous seasons for Caldentey. This jump in workload is partially a result of the two prior seasons being hampered by hamstring injuries. However, the increase in workload for the 2023/24 season also stems from Caldentey's participation for the Spanish national side at the 2024 Olympics (6 appearances) and the newly launched UEFA Nations League (7 appearances).

## Caldentey's Hectic Start to 2024



Caldentey's start of the 2024 calendar was jam-packed as she played 10 back-to-back games in 36 days. This period consisted of playing five league matches, two Supercopa matches, two UWCL matches and a Copa de la Reina match.

# MOEKA MINAMI

## Analysed period:

10th September 2023 – 10th August 2024



Japan



DOB: 07/12/1998

Centre Back

Minami has had an integral role for her club and national team sides. Her 2023/24 campaign ended with a quarter-final exit against the USA at the 2024 Paris Olympics. At club level for AS Roma, Minami played 37 games, which included 36 appearances in the starting line-up.

## Match load

Total appearances in period



Total minutes played in period

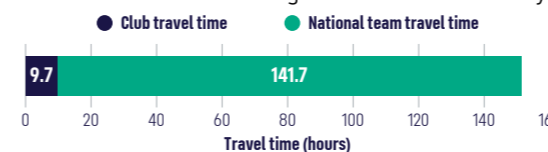


Percentage of back-to-back games in period



## Travel load

Over the 2023/24 season (including the 2024 Paris Olympics), Minami accumulated over 151 hours of international travel time with most of it coming from national team duty.



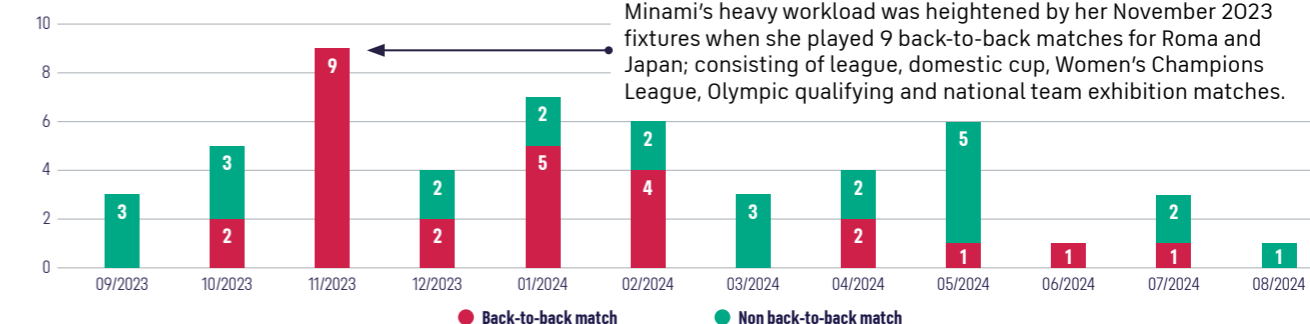
## Post-Olympic return to club

Minami had only 16 days between her last game of the 2023/24 season and her reporting back date to AS Roma pre-season training.

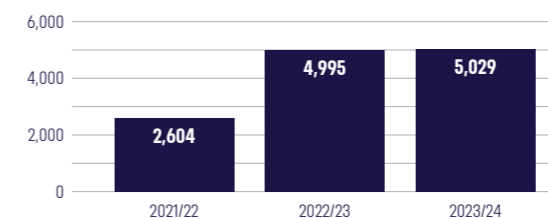


## Number of back-to-back appearances by month

Minami's heavy workload was heightened by her November 2023 fixtures when she played 9 back-to-back matches for Roma and Japan; consisting of league, domestic cup, Women's Champions League, Olympic qualifying and national team exhibition matches.

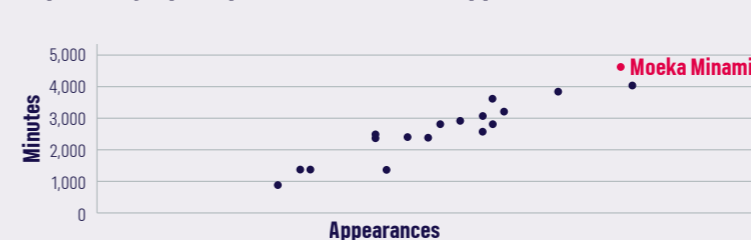


## Overview of the last three full seasons (minutes)



Minami's last two seasons were quintessential cases of a player being more heavily relied upon by their club and national team across a number of competitions. This heavy workload comes off the back of her move to AS Roma at the beginning of the 2022/23 season from Urawa Red Diamonds in addition to featuring more often for the Japanese national team. The increased workload is highlighted by the steep increase in appearances from 2021/22 (27) to 2022/23 (54), as well.

## Japan's Olympic squad - 2023/24 total appearances and minutes



Between the end of the 2023 Women's World Cup and prior to the start of the 2024 Olympic Games, Minami accumulated the most minutes (4,700) and 2nd most appearances (49) among all members of Japan's Olympic squad.

# ELLIE CARPENTER

## Analysed period:

21st August 2023 – 10th August 2024



DOB: 28/04/2000

Right-Back

Carpenter had a significant impact for Olympique Lyonnais and the Australian national team in the 2023/24 season, concluding her campaign in the group stages of the 2024 Paris Olympics with the Matildas. At club level, she played regularly for Olympique Lyonnais, helping the club reach the UWCL final.

## Match load

Total appearances in period

**45**

Total minutes played in period

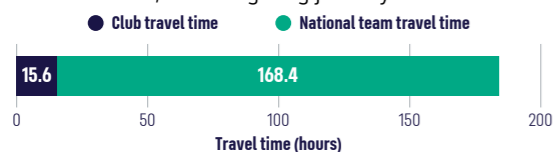
**3,849**

Percentage of back-to-back games in period



## Travel load

In the 2023/24 season, Carpenter took 23 international trips lasting 184 hours, with 92% due to national team commitments, including long journeys to Australia.



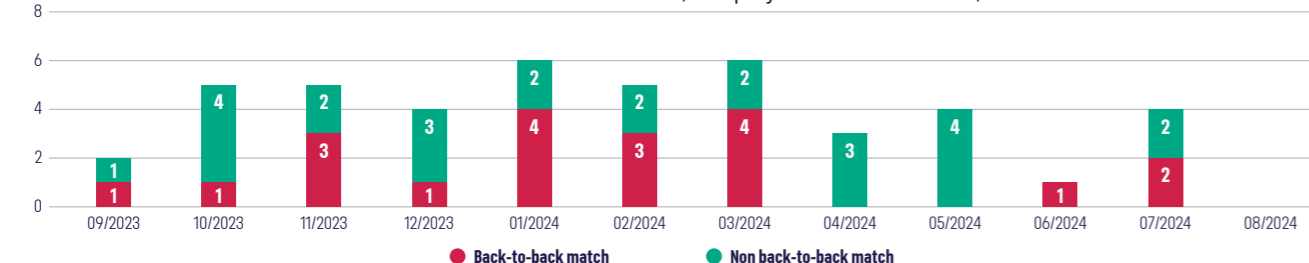
## Post-Olympic return to club

From her last game of the 2023/24 season, the 2-1 loss to the USA in the Paris Olympics, Carpenter only had 10 days before she reported back to Olympique Lyonnais for pre-season training.

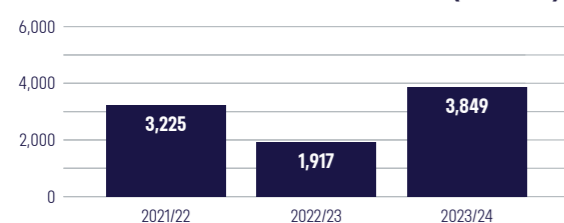


## Number of back-to-back appearances by month

Carpenter's workload peaked in January and March 2024. In each month, she played six club matches, 4 of which were back-to-back.

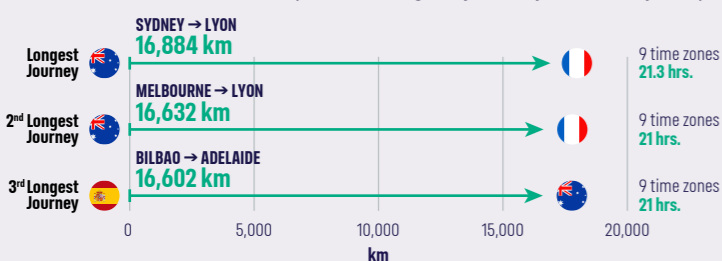


## Overview of the last three full seasons (minutes)



After fully recovering from an ACL injury in the 2022/23 season, Carpenter's 2023/24 season was a personal best for total accumulated minutes. This increase in workload is not only derived from her not having any significant injuries during the season but also from featuring more regularly for one of Europe's elite club sides that progressed far in both domestic and international club competitions. The workload jump is evident when looking at her club appearances as they rose from 29 (2021/22) and 11 (2022/23) to 33 (2023/24).

## International Travel Load Top three longest journeys made by Carpenter in 2023/24



An important insight that can be drawn from Carpenter's 2023/24 season concerns the sheer travel she had to undertake. Representing the Australian national side, Carpenter had to undertake three trips each over 16,600kms and lasting 21+ hours. This travel to and from her national team commitments adds a significant travel load burden for the player who is then expected to perform for her club side.

# RACHEAL KUNDANANJI

## Analysed period:

21st August 2023 – 10th August 2024



DOB: 03/06/2000

Forward

KundanANJI's 2023/24 campaign was highly noteworthy as she featured in her national team's second ever appearance at the Olympics as well as being the subject of a record club transfer where she moved from Madrid CFF to Bay FC.

## Match load

Total appearances in period

**33**

Total minutes played in period

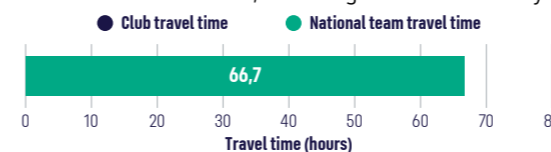
**2,956**

Percentage of back-to-back games in period



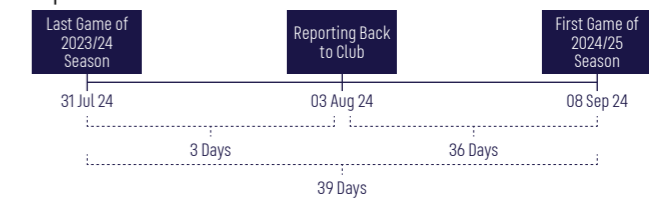
## Travel load

KundanANJI accumulated over 66 hours of international travel in the 2023/24 season, all from her commitments with the Zambian national team, including the 2024 Paris Olympics.



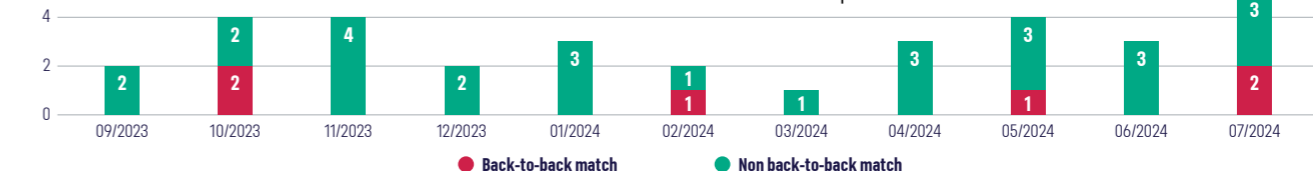
## Post-Olympic return to club

From her last game of the 2024 Paris Olympics (a 4-1 loss against Germany), KundananJI only had three days before she reported back to her NWSL club side.

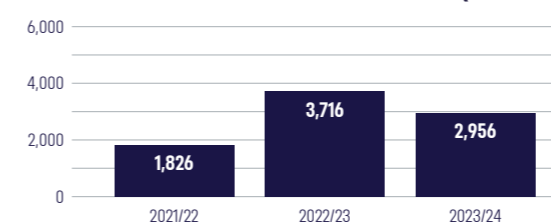


## Number of back-to-back appearances by month

Due to KundananJI playing for club sides that did not participate in continental club competitions during the 2023/24 season, her number of appearances and back-to-back matches are relatively low compared to some other players. This highlights the disparity in workload between players who do and don't participate in continental club competitions.

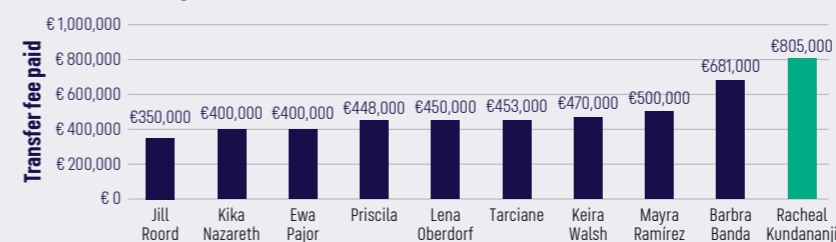


## Overview of the last three full seasons (minutes)



KundanANJI minutes over the 2022/23 and 2023/24 seasons were a big step up compared to the 2021/22 season, as in both seasons she almost accumulated 3000+ minutes. This jump comes partly off the back of an increased number of appearances driven largely in part by KundananJI's re-emergence in the Zambia national team, making 12 appearances in 2022/23 and 6 in 2023/24 (before the 2024 Paris Olympics).

## The most expensive women's footballer of all time



As of the time of this report, KundananJI has the title of the 'most expensive women's footballer of all time' from a transfer fee perspective. The reported €805,000 transfer fee from Madrid CFF to Bay FC was more than €120,000 than the second most expensive women's football transfer, which coincidentally, was for KundananJI's national team compatriot Barbra Banda.



# 08

## METHODOLOGY

The findings presented in this report are largely based on the methodology and metrics of the Women's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform covering the match, rest & recovery, travel, and other workload statistics of professional footballers from around the world.



# 08 / METHODOLOGY

## WOMEN'S PLAYER WORKLOAD MONITORING (PWM) PLATFORM

The PWM platform illustrates workload and match scheduling across different competitions, maximising data, and knowledge to address the growing information needs in football. The tool supports decision-makers to make informed decisions about the next generation of sustainable and integrated competitions in women's football.

### Mission statement & objectives

Originally launched in 2021, the Women's Player Workload Monitoring Platform illustrates player workload and match scheduling across different competitions, maximising data, and knowledge to address the growing information needs of the football industry on aggregated player load across multiple competitions.

The platform supports decision-makers to make informed decisions about the next generation of sustainable and integrated competitions. The core objectives of the platform are:

- Prioritise player health, career, and performance;
- Enable workload and match schedule monitoring;
- Provide scientific data analysis across competitions;
- Support evidence-based decision-making.



### About Player Workload Monitoring

The Women's Player Workload Monitoring Platform provides transparent and regular player workload updates to the football industry, covering a global sample of professional footballers.

The platform allows multi-level analysis with the purpose of improving the integrated management of match calendars and player workload. It includes metrics such as general match schedules, basic player match load information, a break-down of competition formats, season-by-season analysis, accumulated duration of international travel, as well as the duration of rest and recovery periods.

The digital platform enables an objective analysis of a player's workload, supporting the development of player-centric competition calendars that convey a commitment to peak performance and sustainable career paths. The platform is an ongoing and innovative monitoring tool that is scalable, open and able to address the entire match schedule and related workload of players across competitions at a global level.

### About Football Benchmark

Football Benchmark Group are the global leaders in serving those investing and operating in the football industry. Our expertise lies in generating unparalleled value through our advisory services, powered by our world-renowned football business intelligence solution. We have been working together with FIFPRO on various projects since 2019 with the PWM platform at the centre of the cooperation.

## REPORT PREPARATION NOTES

In order to put the analyses carried out for this report into context, it is important to understand the key characteristics of the underlying dataset sourced from the PWM platform.

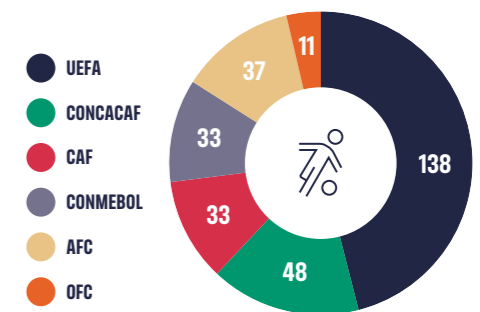
### Player Sample & Profiles

There are currently 300 professional women's football players in the PWM platform, representing a wide range of nationalities. The visual shows the breakdown by the confederation of the players' nationality.

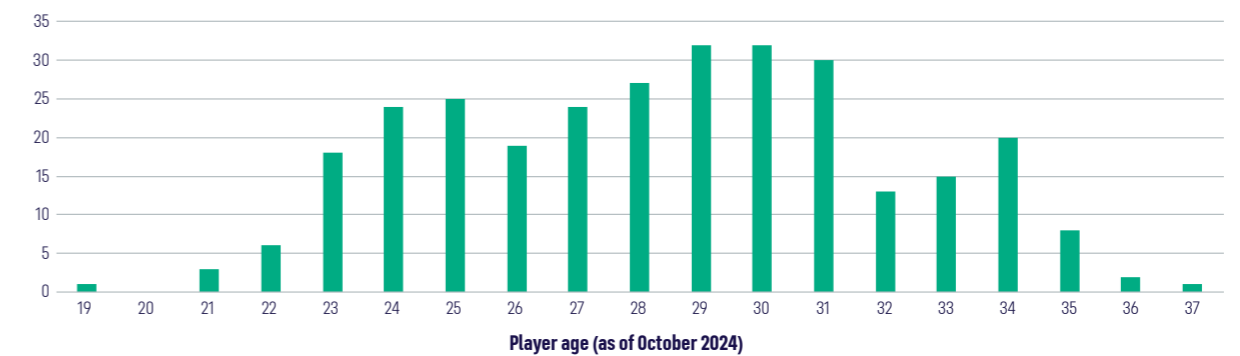
More than 30 domestic leagues and over 100 different football clubs are represented by the players of the database as of the 2023/24 season.

Footballers of all ages between 19 and 37 are in the sample. Players aged between 29 and 31 make up almost one-third of the database.

Number of players by nationality (region)



### No of players by age



### Seasons and matches covered



In total, close to 60,000 player match records are currently available in the PWM platform, providing a strong basis for this report's analysis. The matches analysed for the purposes of most chapters took place between July 2023 and August 2024, covering the entire 2023/24 football season.


Chapter O6 takes a longer-term view as it assesses competitive balance in selected competitions over the last ten full seasons. Data for that analysis was collated from various match databases, including Wyscout, Soccerdonna and Soccerway.

As a general principle, club friendlies were excluded from the scope of this report's analysis. Unless otherwise stated, results pertain only to competitive club games and all national team matches.


## TERMS & DEFINITIONS


The following terms are used throughout the report to illustrate the workload situation of professional football players. The same principles are applied within the FIFPRO PWM platform.


### WORKLOAD STANDARDS


 **PLAYER WORKLOAD** – the term refers to all applicable workload indicators such as match load, rest & recovery, and international travel. The concepts of overload and underload are related to the imbalance between the load induced on players and their recovery. It is important to note that it is the cumulative exposure to over or underload that constitutes an issue for player health, performance, and career longevity.


### MATCH LOAD

 **MINUTES PLAYED** – number of minutes spent on the pitch by a player in a match. Added times at the end of the two halves are included in the calculation, as well as the extra time in competitions where it is applicable.


 **APPEARANCES MADE** – an appearance is when a player has any minutes played in a match, either as a starter or after being substituted on.


 **MATCH FORMAT** – matchday squad inclusions, appearances and minutes on the pitch are divided into various categories based on the format of the match: domestic league, domestic cup, international club competition, national team matches and friendlies.


 **BACK-TO-BACK LOAD** – a match is considered to be in the “back-to-back” category if the player made an appearance (played any minutes) in it and his previous match appearance ended within the preceding 5 days (or 120 hours). Back-to-back minutes refer to minutes recorded in back-to-back matches.

 **UTILISATION RATE** – the number of minutes played by a player divided by the total number of minutes of their team over the same period. This metric is generally calculated only in the case of club matches. A high utilisation rate means that a player is an important and often relied upon member of the team.


### REST & RECOVERY


 **TIME BETWEEN MATCHES (RECOVERY TIME)** – the period between two inclusions in the matchday squad. It is calculated as the number of hours that passed between the end of a player's match in which he was in the matchday squad and the kick-off time of the next one. Even if the player did not play a single minute, he is required to be on standby, thus his inclusion in the matchday squad constitutes a part of his workload. According to FIFPRO's 'At the Limit' study, players need at least 120 hours between games to perform at their best over a season and manage injury risk. To exclude outliers, the time between matches is capped at 336 hours in our calculations.


 **OFF-SEASON BREAK** – the period (expressed in calendar days) without matches or training a player is provided by their club between two seasons in order to recover and regenerate. Off-season breaks are mandatory, should last at least 5 weeks and must take place outside of the club and national team environment.


 **IN-SEASON BREAK** – the period (expressed in calendar days) without matches or training a player is allowed during a season. Should last at least 2 weeks and must take place outside of the club and national team environment.

### TRAVEL LOAD (international only)

 **TRIPS MADE** – only the following type of trips are categorised as international travel: trips made for international club matches (including friendlies) and trips made while in a foreign country on international duty for a national team.

 **TRAVEL DISTANCE** – the flight distance in kilometres between the departure and arrival location of a trip to a national team or an away club match played abroad. If a departure or arrival city does not have an international airport, then the one closest to it is used in our calculations.

 **TRAVEL TIME** – the flight time between two locations expressed in minutes. For every travel time calculation, the speed of an average commercial flight is assumed (approx. 800km). 20 minutes are added to account for take-off and landing.

 **TIME ZONES CROSSED** – a time zone is an area that observes a uniform standard time defined according to the Coordinated Universal Time (UTC). In our calculations we consider the number of time zones crossed by the player while travelling to and from national team and club matches abroad.





# FIFPRO

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