FIFPRO

In cooperation with
FOOTBALL BENCHMARK

OVERWORKED AND UNDERPROTECTED

2024/25 THE PLAYER HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE IMPACT

FIFPRO PLAYER WORKLOAD MONITORING

| Men's Football Report

FIFPRO PLAYER IQ WORKLOAD

UNDER MORE PRESSURE THAN EVER

PLAYERS' AND MANAGERS' VIEW

"THE BUSINESS CAN BE WITHOUT MANAGERS, SPORTING DIRECTORS, MEDIA, OWNERS BUT WITHOUT PLAYERS YOU CANNOT PLAY. THE ONLY ONES WITH THE POWER TO DO IT ARE THEM."

Pep Guardiola

"SOMETIMES NOBODY ASKS THE PLAYERS WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT ADDING MORE GAMES SO MAYBE OUR OPINION DOES NOT MATTER. BUT EVERYBODY KNOWS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT HAVING MORE GAMES. EVERYBODY IS TIRED OF THAT."

Alisson Becker

"HAVING A LOT OF MATCHES... IN LIFE, WHEN YOU ABUSE CERTAIN THINGS, YOU DON'T GIVE THE SAME IMPORTANCE. WE MAY END UP WITH LESS INTEREST IN CERTAIN MATCHES BECAUSE THERE IS OVERCONSUMPTION."

Jules Koundé

"THERE ARE SIMPLY TOO MANY MATCHES... THE NUMBER OF MATCHES IS EXCESSIVE."

Dayot Upamecano

"TO IGNORE THE CONSEQUENCE OF THE NUMBER OF GAMES AND AMOUNT OF TRAVELLING WILL END IN INJURIES FOR ANY PLAYER."

Marcelo Bielsa

WELCOME

It is my great pleasure to present the FIFPRO Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) Report 2024/25.

This annual publication has become an essential resource for football stakeholders, performance coaches, analysts and the media, offering clear and evidence-based insights into how the evolving football calendar impacts the health, performance, and careers of professional players worldwide.

The PWM Report is more than data: it is a call to action. The evidence it provides highlights both the opportunities and the risks within the modern game.

While football continues to grow in reach and ambition, the demands placed upon players have never been greater. At FIFPRO, our priority is to protect and promote the rights and well-being of players.

It is our responsibility - as unions, leagues, clubs, and governing bodies - to ensure that this growth does not come at the expense of the people who bring the sport to life.

This report underlines the urgent need for more balanced competition calendars, in tandem with the implementation of minimum regulatory safeguards, protected rest and recovery periods, and meaningful dialogue among industry decision-makers.

Sustainable solutions are possible if we commit to real collaboration and place the players where they belong - at the center of our thinking.

I invite you to reflect on the findings of this report and to join us in shaping a football ecosystem that is not only competitive and entertaining, but also responsible, safe, and respectful of those on the pitch. Together, we can build a stronger and more sustainable future for the game.

Sergio Marchi
President, FIFPRO


RedBull
prime
Caliente.mx
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GOLD CUP
SAETA
20

01 PLAYER WORKLOAD KEY FINDINGS

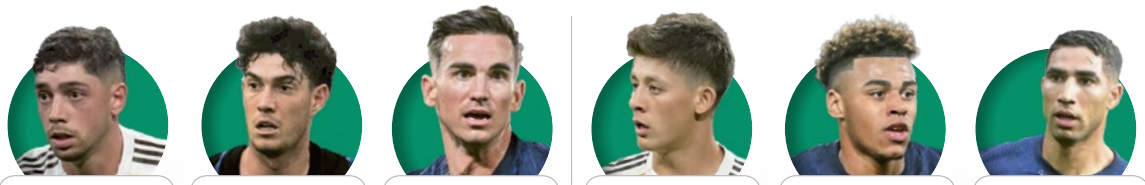
SEASON 2024/2025

FIFPRO PLAYER IQ WORKLOAD

1. RISING HEALTH & PERFORMANCE RISKS DUE TO CALENDAR CONGESTION

RELENTLESS EXPANSION OF OVERLAPPING COMPETITIONS IS DRIVING UNPRECEDENTED DEMANDS, PUTTING PLAYER HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT GROWING RISK.

EXCESSIVE MATCH LOAD



VALVERDE | BASTONI | RUIZ | GÜLER | DOUÉ | HAKIMI

70+ Match Appearances

70+ Matchday Squads

ABSENCE OF RECOVERY

MIN-JAE KIM

20 MATCHES played consecutively back to back

PEDRI

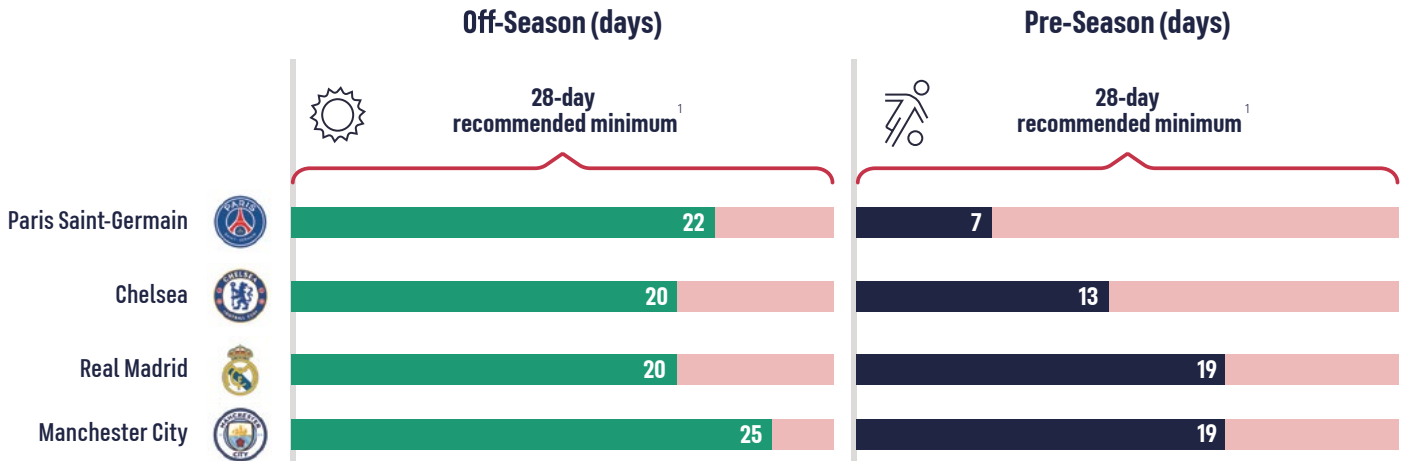
80% + of matches played back to back

JAVIER ALTAMIRANO

24 HOURS between playing match for Chile & playing next club match

2. FIFA CLUB WORLD CUP – MINIMAL REST PERIODS & PRE-SEASON PREPARATION

PLAYERS ARE DENIED ESSENTIAL RECOVERY TIME, WITH DANGEROUSLY SHORT OFF-SEASON BREAKS. IN TANDEM, FUNDAMENTAL PRE-SEASON PREPARATION IS UNDERMINED BY CALENDAR CONGESTION.



None of the analysed CWC participant clubs reached the minimum 28-day off-season

Many CWC participant clubs started the season without the minimum required pre-season and re-training

Off-season break length

Pre-season days (re-training period)

1) See Chapter 02 for minimum workload safeguards

3. PLAYER IMPACT – LACK OF GOVERNANCE STANDARDS & CLUB VS COUNTRY CONFLICT

INTERNATIONAL RELEASE WINDOWS HIGHLIGHT BOTH THE DAMAGING IMPACT OF FOOTBALL'S EXPANDING CALENDAR ON PLAYER HEALTH AND GROWING TENSION BETWEEN CLUBS AND NATIONAL TEAMS OVER RISING INJURIES.

National team football is a key ingredient for players and their careers

Expectations, commitments & pressure weaken players' ability to protect their careers

The issue of players caught between club and national team demands is not new

Mandatory regulations and coordination between clubs and national teams required

"WITHOUT URGENT REFORM OF THE INTERNATIONAL CALENDAR, MINIMUM HEALTH PROTECTIONS AND PROPER COORDINATION OF ALL COMPETITIONS, PLAYERS WILL CONTINUE TO BE PUT AT RISK"

David Terrier, President of the French Players' Union (UNFP)

4. FOOTBALL – A GLOBAL OUTLIER IN PLAYER PROTECTION

FOOTBALL REMAINS A GLOBAL OUTLIER, PROVIDING PLAYERS WITH FAR LESS POST-SEASON RECOVERY TIME THAN OTHER MAJOR SPORTS. EXPERTS AGREE ON URGENTLY REQUIRED AND BINDING MINIMUM WORKLOAD PROTECTIONS TO SAFEGUARD PLAYER HEALTH.

Top European Club & National Team Player
3 WEEKS

NBA Finalist
14 WEEKS

Non-Playoffs
23 WEEKS

AFL Finalist
14 WEEKS

Non-Playoffs
17 WEEKS

MLB Finalist
15 WEEKS

Non-Playoffs
20 WEEKS

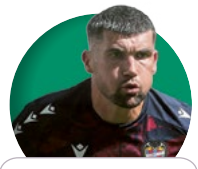
5. INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AND RECOVERY REMAIN ACUTE THREAT TO PLAYER HEALTH

CROSS-CONTINENTAL TRAVEL AND IRRESPONSIBLE COMPETITION SCHEDULING AMPLIFY FATIGUE AND UNDERMINE RECOVERY, ESPECIALLY DURING INTERNATIONAL WINDOWS.

MOISÉS CAICEDO

25,000 KM

distance travelled to play four matches in 14 days



MATHEW RYAN

MARKO STAMENIĆ

165,000 KM +

distance travelled internationally

Extremely Short Recovery Time After International Windows

Miguel Almirón
(Paraguay & Atlanta United)

Brazil — Paraguay, 1–0

44.7 hours

New York City — Atlanta United, 4–0

Ronald Araujo
(Uruguay & FC Barcelona)

Bolivia — Uruguay, 0–0

46 hours

FC Barcelona — Osasuna, 3–0

6. EXTREME HEAT – A GROWING ASPECT OF PLAYER LOAD AND HEALTH & SAFETY

THERE IS A GROWING NEED FOR COLLABORATION TO ADDRESS HEAT-RELATED RISKS IN FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS.

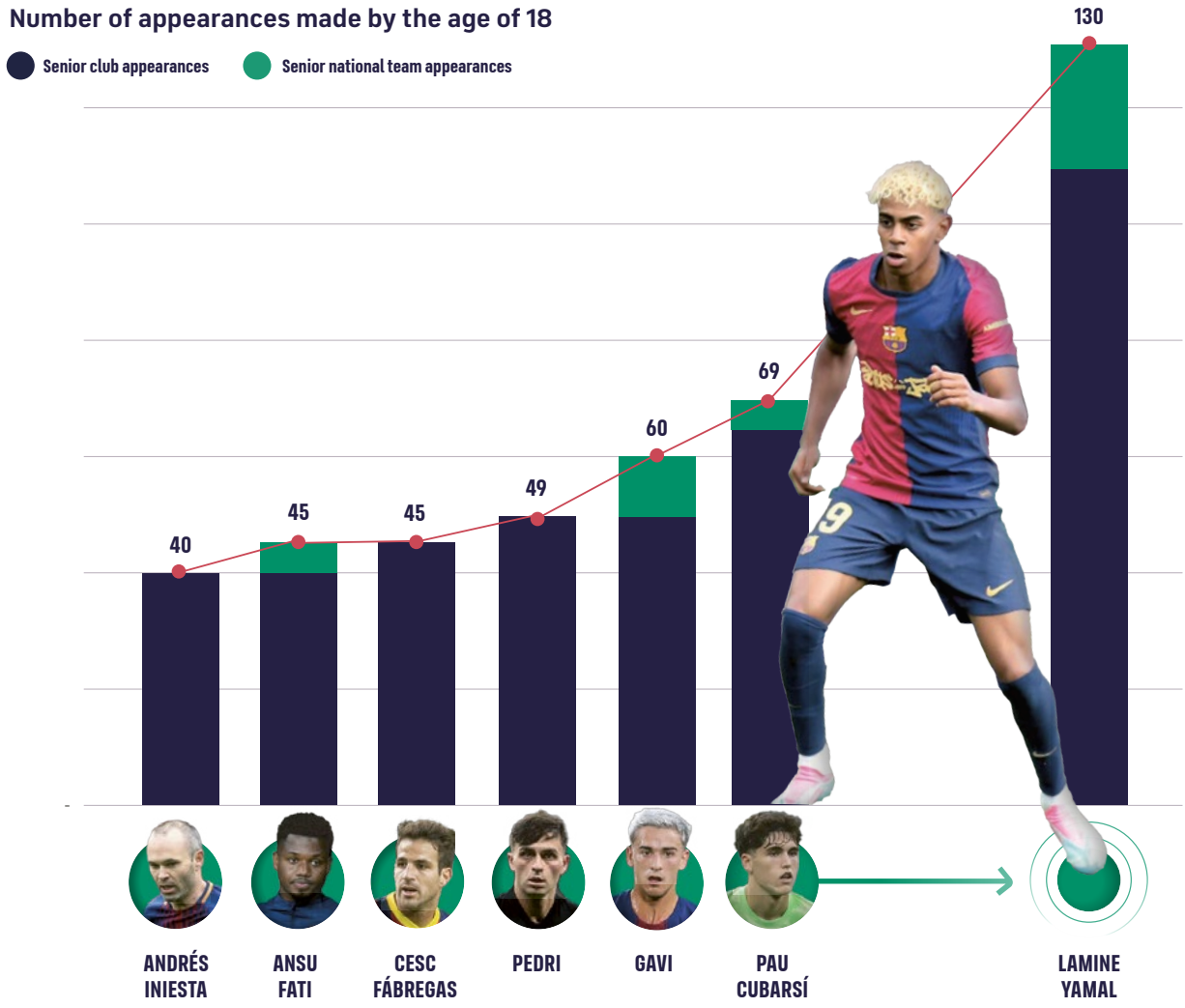
"THE HEAT IS INCREDIBLE. THE TRUTH IS, PLAYING AT THAT TIME IS VERY DANGEROUS. THE SPEED OF PLAY IS NOT THE SAME. EVERYTHING BECOMES VERY SLOW."

Enzo Fernández, Chelsea and Argentina

- UPDATE HEAT POLICIES IN COMPETITION REGULATIONS & OPERATIONAL PLANNING
- COLLABORATION BETWEEN ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO PRIORITISE HEAT PROTECTION
- INCLUDE PLAYERS IN DECISION-MAKING REGARDING

7. YOUNG PLAYERS NEED GREATER PROTECTION

RELENTLESS COMPETITION DEMANDS EXPOSE YOUNG PLAYERS TO LONG-TERM RISKS, MAKING TARGETED SAFEGUARDS ESSENTIAL FOR CAREER LONGEVITY.



" IT'S A SHAME. HE WENT TO THE NATIONAL TEAM IN PAIN, PLAYED AND WAS GIVEN PAINKILLERS TO PLAY... THAT'S NOT TAKING CARE OF THE PLAYERS. IT WOULD BE WORTH TAKING CARE OF THE YOUNG PLAYERS " Hansi Flick, Head Coach of FC Barcelona

ENDRICK
5,257
Senior Minutes Before Turning 18

ESTEVAO
4,886
Senior Minutes Before Turning 18

NEYMAR
3,468
Senior Minutes Before Turning 18

EL KHANNOUSS
10,628
Senior Minutes Before Turning 21

ZIYECH
3,039
Senior Minutes Before Turning 21

02

MINIMUM WORKLOAD SAFEGUARDS: MEDICAL POSITION STATEMENTS

As in any other profession, football players must be afforded minimum health standards and workplace protections. However, we find that these crucial safeguards are still lacking and there is no regulatory framework for them in international football. This recent Delphi research study, featuring the responses of 70 independent medical and performance experts reached consensus on 12 minimum safety standards and called for their immediate implementation to protect the health of professional football players.

02 / MINIMUM WORKLOAD SAFEGUARDS: MEDICAL POSITION STATEMENTS

MEDICAL POSITION STATEMENTS IN SUPPORT OF PLAYER WELLBEING

In June 2025, FIFPRO and its High-Performance Advisory Network (HPAN) published a research study titled *'Medical Position Statement on Minimum Player Workload Safeguards in Men's Professional Football'.* This position paper was developed in response to increasing concerns over the health consequences of congested match calendars and insufficient recovery time among elite footballers. While some safeguards already exist under national collective bargaining agreements, international football lacks standardised frameworks to tackle these concerns.

The output of the study was 12 minimum player workload safeguards in the form of consensus statements. We strongly believe that these should serve as the benchmark for regulatory bodies seeking to align competition formats with evidence-based health and safety principles.

Methodological Framework

The statements were developed using a modified Delphi process, a methodological approach for achieving expert consensus. In February and March 2025, three survey rounds were administered to a panel of **70 medical and performance experts** currently active in men's professional football, across both club and national team levels. Most of the group have worked in football for at least a decade and some have over 20 years of relevant experience. To remove bias, responses were collected anonymously.

The Delphi surveys included a total of 19 statements derived from prior research, occupational health literature, and stakeholder perspectives. Participants were asked to rate their agreement: a consensus threshold of 75% agreement or disagreement was required for a statement to be retained. Statements meeting this threshold were finalized, while others were either reformulated or excluded.

Main Results: Medical Position Statements

Twelve statements reached the required consensus threshold and thus form the core recommendations of the study. These are categorized under five themes: off-season break, in-season rest & recovery, mid-season break, travel, and young player safeguards. They are introduced on the next page.

It must be noted that beyond these 12 statements, there were several others that almost reached the required consensus level of 75%: these issues include seasonal match limits and fixture congestion controls. Experts stress that these areas require additional research and discussion to establish precise parameters, particularly regarding specific protections for players under 21.

The **final list of consensus statements reflects an evolving understanding of athlete welfare as an occupational health concern**. The study underscores the need to embed recovery periods, off-season structure, and youth protections into competition design and regulatory frameworks. These findings also align with legal obligations under European and international labour standards, as highlighted by previous FIFPRO-commissioned research (KU Leuven, 2023), which found that current football structures may violate health and safety regulations. The **study provides a scientific basis for integrating player welfare considerations into the International Match Calendar and related scheduling decisions**. It also highlights the role of expert consensus in translating multidisciplinary insights into actionable governance standards for elite sport.

For more details, please refer to full report that is available on the FIFPRO website.

EXPERT'S VIEW

THE PRESSING NEED FOR STRUCTURAL SAFEGUARDS

PROF. VINCENT GOUTTEBARGE
Medical Director
FIFPRO

The current dynamic of the International Match Calendar (IMC) in men professional football induces various challenges and concerns for players, including congested match schedules, inadequate recovery, substantial susceptibility to injuries and increased travels.

Given these challenges and concerns, there is a need for a player-centric position statement with specific recommendations related to the key dimensions of the IMC in men professional football. Therefore, FIFPRO aimed to define such a player-centric expert position statement, with a focus on schedule considerations to allow adequate recovery time between matches, addressing the impact of travel on players, optimizing working conditions, and managing overall workload. A modified three-round Delphi survey approach was used as evidence-based process to develop the position statement, relying on evidence triangulation coming from the sports and exercise medicine literature, the occupational and legal safety literature, and the views of professional players and support staff. Ultimately, experts working in performance or medical roles within men professional football (at club or national team level) completed three rounds of survey in order to validate the player-centric expert position statement. This modified three-round Delphi survey design used by FIFPRO is widely recognized in sports and exercise medicine, enabling expert knowledge collection through multiple rounds of anonymous questionnaires to reach consensus about a specific topic.

From the 19 recommendations formulated initially according to the scientific literature and the views of players and staff, 12 reached consensus among experts through the three-round Delphi survey approach. These 12 recommendations form thus the core of FIPRO's player-centric expert position statement, spanning five key dimensions: in season recovery and fatigue, off-season break, mid-season break, travel, and workload safeguards for young players.

> **Grounded in scientific evidence, occupational health principles and the perspectives of players and coaches, this consensus-driven expert position statement underscores the need for structural safeguards in men's professional football.**

While consensus on match workload thresholds was not reached, it is worth noting that there was broad agreement among experts on the need to set maximum limits, reflecting growing concern over cumulative workload, injury risk, and the long-term impact on players' physical and mental health, and performance.

CONSENSUS-BASED MEDICAL POSITION STATEMENTS FOR COMPETITION REGULATIONS

OFF-SEASON BREAK

1. Players should be guaranteed a minimum of 4 weeks between seasons (off-season break), with no club or national team travel, training, or media commitments.
2. The off-season break should include a blackout period of 2 weeks (without any contact with club or national team).
3. There should be a minimum 4-week retraining period after an off-season break before starting with the competition.
4. Clubs should provide players with optional monitoring (e.g., following a prescribed training program or wellness monitoring) during the off-season break.

IN-SEASON REST & RECOVERY

5. There should be a minimum of two days between appearances to allow players to adequately recover.
6. A diagnosed injured player should not compete in a match until cleared by a medical professional from the player's club.
7. Players should have a mandatory one day off per week.

MID-SEASON BREAK

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

TRAVEL

9. The increased burden of travel resulting in either travel fatigue or jet lag should be considered when scheduling fixture calendars.
10. There should be a rest period between a long-haul flight and a subsequent squad inclusion to adequately recover from either travel fatigue or jet lag.

YOUNG PLAYER SAFEGUARDS

11. There should be specific workload safeguards for academy players (under 18 years old).
12. More research is needed to decide whether there should be specific workload safeguards for young players (under 21 years old).

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

Majority expert agreement but no consensus (<75%)

69%

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

60%

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

74%

of experts endorsed specific workload safeguards for Under-21 players but called for more research on the specifics.

DELPHI STUDY - EXPERTS' CHARACTERISTICS

Breakdown of experts by participation

133	70	55	55	63
Experts Contacted for the Study	Experts Consented to Participate	Completed Round 1 (79%)	Completed Round 2 (79%)	Completed Round 3 (90%)

Breakdown of experts by demography and experience

Age	Role	Primary Involvement	Experience
18–30: 2%	High Performance: 36%	Club: 73%	0–10 years: 22%
31–40: 27%	Medical: 64%	National Team: 27%	11–20 years: 54%
41–50: 42%			21 –30 years: 17%
51–60: 17%			>30 years: 7%
>60: 12%			

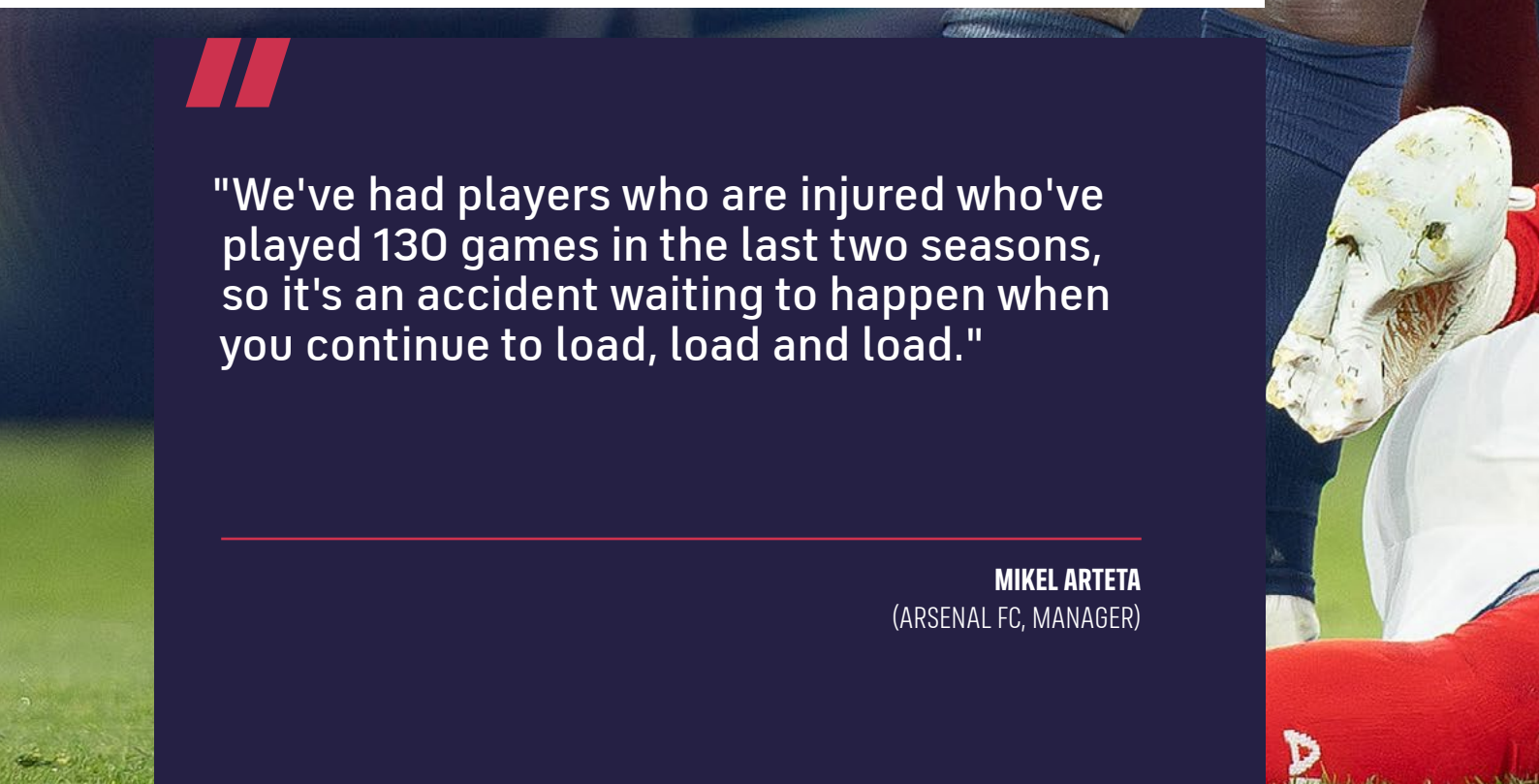
Breakdown of experts based on the confederations they have worked in

Confederation					
AFC Asian Football Confederation	CAF	Concacaf	CONMEBOL	OFC	UEFA
7%	7%	12%	0%	0%	74%

03

MATCH LOAD:
2024/25 SEASON REVIEW

The 2024/25 season was demanding for many players. Expansion of international club competitions has put further pressure on the match calendar, leading to unprecedently long and congested seasons. Even though there were fewer national team tournaments this summer than in 2024, many did not get any respite as they routinely exceeded 60-70 appearances again.



"We've had players who are injured who've played 130 games in the last two seasons, so it's an accident waiting to happen when you continue to load, load and load."

MIKEL ARTETA
(ARSENAL FC, MANAGER)


UEFA FOUNDATION
AFC
Emirates

03 / MATCH LOAD

INTRODUCTION

The FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform uses several non-exhaustive metrics to describe players' match load. These are then used in conjunction with data gathered on rest, recovery and travel to provide a holistic picture of player workload demands.

When analysing player workload, the number of matches the players were involved in is a simple yet very important metric to consider. Although the intensity of play during those games and their external context are also relevant, the overall volume of match participation (either on the pitch or on the bench) provides a strong foundation for our analysis.

This chapter starts with multiple player rankings for the 2024/25 season regarding match load, with a special focus on back-to-back games. Importantly, the rankings are based on the 1,500-player sample of the FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform. It is then followed by a player case study highlighting different types of match load and its breakdown by competition type across seasons. Finally, similar to last year's workload report, insights from the segmentation analysis of a large player sample are discussed.

PWM Methodology: Key Pillars

MATCH LOAD

Indicators related to match workload such as no. of appearances, squad inclusions and utilisation. Evolution away from micro-level metrics, including minutes played in congested periods.

- **Inclusions in a matchday squad**
- **Match appearances**
- **Minutes played on-pitch**
- **Competition type of match**
- **Appearances in back-to-back matches** (less than 5 days in-between)
- **Utilisation rate** (% of minutes/matches played out of total)

REST & RECOVERY

Rest and recovery time alloved between matches and competitions throughout the season. Special focus on long sequences of back-to-back matches.

SEASON BREAKS

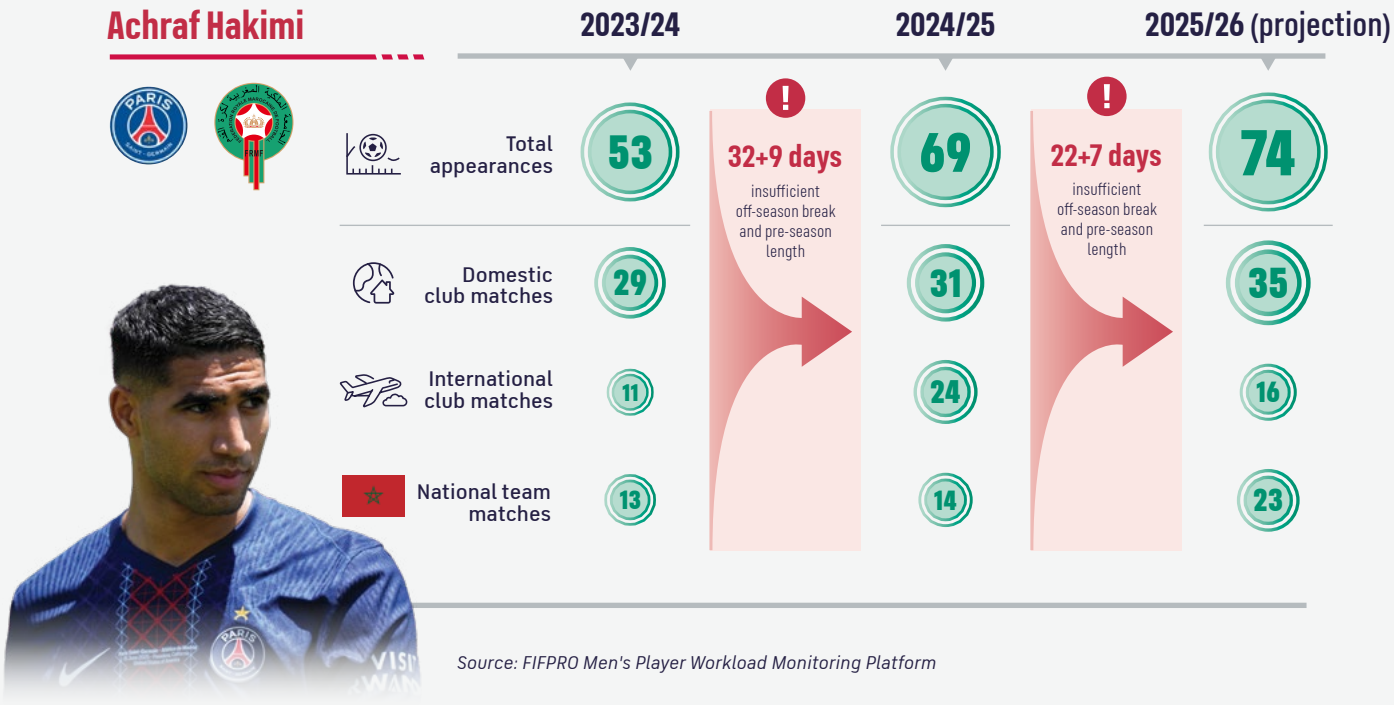
Rest time entirely outside of the club and/or national team environments. Off-season and in-season breaks considered. Working time/days also now explored.

TRAVEL LOAD

Indicators of international cross-border (air) travel such as travel distance, trip frequency and time-zone crossings.

PLAYER CASE STUDY – ACHRAF HAKIMI

CONSISTENTLY HIGH LOAD



Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

Achraf Hakimi's match load over the past two seasons, with more demands expected in the year ahead, reflects a significant and growing level of physical strain, shaped by both club success and international commitments. **The breakdown of his workload has shifted season by season, alternating between heavy club and national team demands** — leaving little time for rest or recovery as one competition often rolls straight into the next.

In the **2023/24** season, Hakimi played 53 matches, including 40 appearances for Paris Saint-Germain FC and 13 for the Moroccan national team, totalling 4,869 minutes. While this workload was substantial, it remained within a sustainable range for an elite player, just under the 55-appearance maximum threshold recommended by experts. He also benefited from a 32-day-long off-season break. The **2024/25** season marked a sharp increase in match load. Hakimi played 69 matches and accumulated 6,371 minutes on the pitch. His season began early with participation in the Paris Olympic Games for Morocco and ended later than usual due to PSG's extended campaign, which included reaching the finals of both the UEFA Champions League and the FIFA Club World Cup. Consequently, his off-season was reduced to just 22 days, with PSG resuming training on 6 August 2025, significantly below recommended recovery standards.

Looking ahead, the **2025/26** campaign could bring an even greater match load. Beginning with the UEFA Super Cup just 31 days after the Club World Cup's conclusion, current projections indicate that Hakimi may play up to 74 matches and nearly 7,000 minutes. This assumes PSG once again reaches the latter stages of the UEFA Champions League, and Morocco advances to the knockout rounds of both the next Africa Cup of Nations and the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Across the three seasons, the upward trend in match load is clear. Recovery periods are shrinking, and the cumulative demands on Hakimi's body and mind are intensifying. While he continues to perform at the highest level, maintaining this consistency without sufficient rest carries risks. For both club and country, proactively managing his schedule and ensuring periods of recovery will be essential, amid the continuous cycle of overlapping competitions, to preserving long-term performance and player welfare.

MATCH LOAD

Highest match load rankings are dominated by FIFA Club World Cup participants

Top 10 players by matchday squad inclusions

Rank	Player name	Club	Nationality	Total matchday squad inclusions	of which: club - domestic	of which: club - internat.	of which: club - friendly	of which: national team
1	ARCHIE GRAY			80	45	15	6	14
=	ARDA GÜLER			80	46	22	3	9
3	LUKA MODRIĆ			79	44	22	3	10
4	JOÃO NEVES			76	39	24	2	11
5	ALESSANDRO BASTONI			75	42	19	4	10
6	FEDERICO VALVERDE			73	44	22	0	7
=	FABIAN RUIZ			73	39	24	0	10
=	DÉSIRÉ DOUÉ			73	39	24	0	10
=	JOŠKO GVARDIOL			73	46	14	3	10
=	KRISTJAN ASLLANI			73	41	17	5	10

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform

Top 10 players by appearances made

Rank	Player name	Club	Nationality	Total appearances	of which: club - domestic	of which: club - internat.	of which: club - friendly	of which: national team
1	LUKA MODRIĆ			76	41	22	3	10
2	FEDERICO VALVERDE			72	43	22	0	7
3	FABIAN RUIZ			71	37	24	0	10
4	ALESSANDRO BASTONI			70	39	18	3	10
5	ACHRAF HAKIMI			69	31	24	0	14
=	JOSHUA KIMMICH			69	36	19	4	10
=	PEDRI			69	45	14	0	10
=	JOÃO NEVES			69	35	24	2	8
=	KEREM AKTÜRKOGLU			69	40	18	1	10
=	DÉSIRÉ DOUÉ			69	38	23	0	8

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

Total appearances made	Total minutes played
63	4,613
60	3,414
76	4,376
69	5,173
70	5,548
72	6,676
71	4,995
69	4,242
67	6,083
53	3,283

Being in the matchday squad provides an interesting perspective on the holistic workload demands of players. Even if the player does not end up playing any minutes, they still have to be physically present and fully participate in team preparations, mentally prepare, while often spending time away from home and undertaking international travel. As such, these occasions are also part of the player's working time commitments.

Looking specifically at the 2024/25 campaign, the ten players with the highest number of matchday squad inclusions provides crucial insights. **First and foremost, it is telling that 9 of 10 players of the ranking participated in the FIFA Club World Cup (CWC) in the summer**, adding several matches to their already long season. There are three players each from finalists (and UEFA Champions League winners) Paris Saint-Germain FC and Real Madrid CF. There are two from Italian side FC Internazionale Milano and one from Manchester City FC.

Interestingly, the only non-CWC participant is the player at the top: **Archie Gray** from Tottenham Hotspur FC. He had an early start in July 2024 with several friendly matches played in preparation for the campaign. As the season progressed, he established himself as an important member of the Spurs side that triumphed in the UEFA Europa League final. Gray also had 14 games for the England Under-21 side in 2024/25, culminating in the Under-21 European Championship in June 2025. He had the most national team squad inclusions out of all players in the top 10.

Total matchday squad incl.	Total minutes played
79	4,376
73	6,676
73	4,995
75	5,548
71	6,371
69	6,305
69	5,503
76	5,173
70	4,798
73	4,242

Stepping onto the pitch imposes greater physical and mental performance-related workload demands on players than simply being part of the matchday squad. As most high-utilisation players rarely end matches as unused substitutes, it is not surprising to see many of the same names in the top 10 list by appearances as in the top 10 by matchday squad inclusion. However, there are a few notable differences: Achraf Hakimi, Joshua Kimmich, Pedri and Kerem Aktürkoglu have all played in 69 matches each during 2024/25. This is the joint fifth-highest figure among all players of the PWM sample. Almost every time they were selected for a matchday squad, they ended up on the pitch, with the majority of occasions being in the starting line-up.

A peculiar feature of the ranking is that it is led by **Luka Modrić**, who is by far the oldest player in the top 10. Even though he played less than 60 minutes on average in each appearance, this still led to a season-total well above 4,000 minutes over his 76 games. Although close to 40 years of age, Modrić still remained an important part of the Croatian national team as captain.

Finally, it must be noted that all ten players on the list played at the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup and by far surpassed the recommended maximum limit of 55 match appearances per season.

SHORT RECOVERY PERIODS

Congested calendar with overlapping competitions prevents player recovery

Top 10 players by number of back-to-back appearances made

Rank	Player name	Club	Nationality	Total back-to-back appearances	of which: club - domestic	of which: club - internat.	of which: club - friendly	of which: national team
1	FEDERICO VALVERDE			58	37	18	-	3
2	PEDRI			55	36	12	-	7
=	LUKA MODRIĆ			55	30	17	2	6
4	RAPHINHA			53	34	13	1	5
5	JULIAN ALVAREZ			52	33	13	-	6
6	FABIAN RUIZ			51	25	18	-	8
7	JUDE BELLINGHAM			50	28	17	-	5
=	VINÍCIUS JÚNIOR			50	31	15	1	3
=	PAU CUBARSÍ			50	33	12	-	5
10	BRUNO FERNANDES			49	28	15	2	6

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform

Top 10 players by longest back-to-back appearance streak

Rank	Player name	Club	Nationality	Longest back-to-back match appearance streak	Streak start
1	MIN-JAE KIM			20	02/10/2024
2	RODRYGO			19	12/01/2025
3	ZENO DEBAST			18	09/09/2024
=	DÉSIRÉ DOUÉ			18	15/01/2025
=	PEDRI			18	20/03/2025
=	LAMINE YAMAL			18	20/03/2025
7	FRENKIE DE JONG			17	23/03/2025
8	DOR PERETZ			16	01/09/2024
=	MORTEN HJULMAND			16	22/10/2024
=	JULIAN ALVAREZ			16	20/10/2024

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

Total appea-rances	Back-to-back %
72	81%
69	80%
76	72%
67	79%
67	78%
71	72%
66	76%
68	74%
66	76%
68	72%

The term back-to-back matches refers to a sequence of matches played with less than five days of recovery time since the previous match. The number and share of such appearances is one of the most relevant metrics when assessing how congested the calendar can become. A high number of games in this category indicates that the player is regularly not afforded adequate time for recovery and training between games, potentially increasing the risks of fatigue and injury.

The 2024/25 season's top 10 ranking based on back-to-back appearances is **dominated by Real Madrid CF and FC Barcelona**, with four and three representatives, respectively. Both clubs employ many stars who are also regulars for their national teams, and it is very common for them to play twice a week almost every week throughout the season. These mid-week matches are very often international club competitions, as shown by the breakdown by competition type in the overview table. Real Madrid's midfielder, Federico Valverde, leads the ranking with 58 back-to-back appearances.

Looking back to last year's study, the highest back-to-back appearances figure was "only" 51 in the 2023/24 season (Fredrik Aursnes, SL Benfica & Norway). **This year, no fewer than six players matched or surpassed that number, which could indicate a more congested season, at least for the top Spanish sides.**

Bruno Fernandes is in tenth place with 49 back-to-back matches. Notably, two of those came in the post-season tour of Manchester United FC in Malaysia and Hong Kong. Driven by commercial considerations, the team flew from the UK to Asia almost immediately after their last Premier League game of the season further inhibiting player rest at the end of the club season.

Streak end	Streak length in days
14/12/2024	73
15/03/2025	62
17/11/2024	69
16/03/2025	60
18/05/2025	59
18/05/2025	59
18/05/2025	56
02/11/2024	62
22/12/2024	61
15/12/2024	56

According to FIFPRO's 2022 'Player and High-Performance Coach Surveys', players should not exceed 4 to 6 consecutive back-to-back games at any point in the season. However, we found that the top 10 longest streaks in 2024/25 ran for an average of 17.6 consecutive games, a significant increase from last season's 15.8.

The longest streak was attributed to Kim Min-jae who accumulated 20 appearances back-to-back between October and December 2024, one of the longest runs on record in the past few years in the PWM platform. His run started with FC Bayern München's UEFA Champions League match at Aston Villa FC and concluded with a Bundesliga round. Between them, Kim also had appearances in the DFB-Pokal and played four FIFA World Cup qualifiers for the South Korean national team that involved considerable travel load, as well. The streak lasted 73 days in total, during which the player had an appearance every 3.6 days. This poses a serious threat to the player's health and performance, dramatically increasing his risk of injury when consistently playing under fatigue without the opportunity to fully recover. Later in the season it was revealed that Kim had been dealing with an Achilles tendon issue since October 2024. In the end, this injury sidelined him in May 2025, and the player had to miss his country's June World Cup qualifiers and the FIFA Club World Cup, as well.

PLAYER SEGMENTATION BY MATCH LOAD

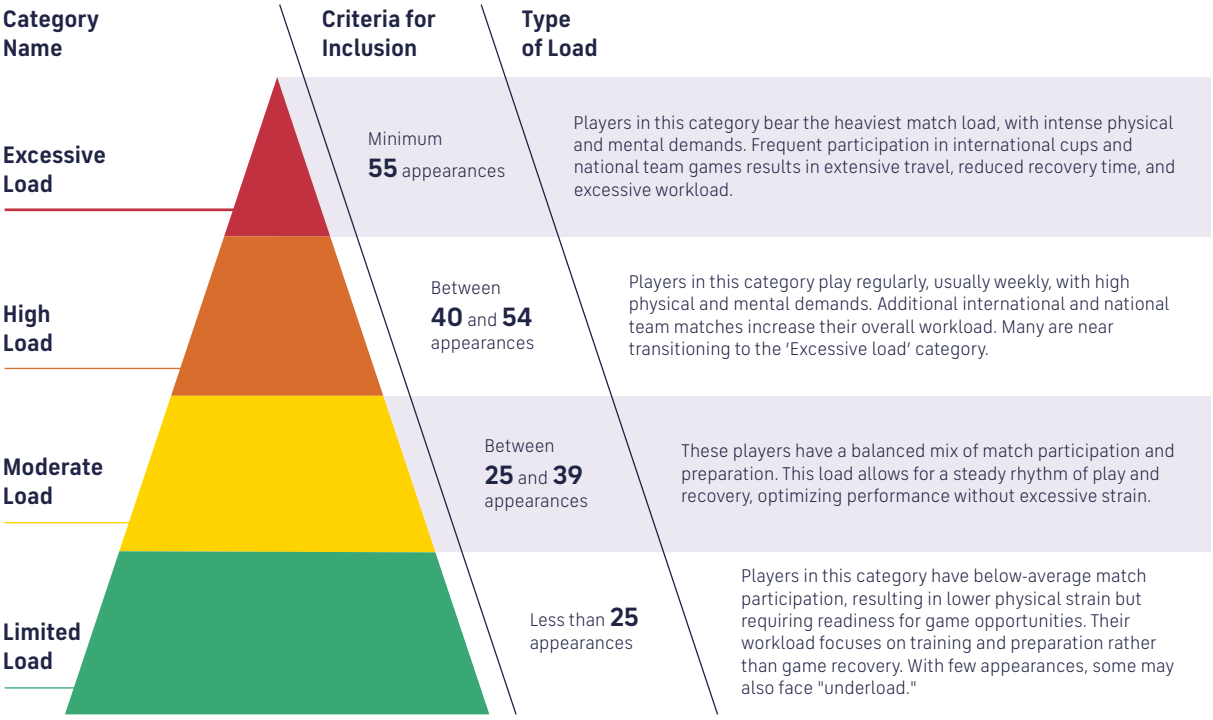
Applied Methodology and 2024/25 Results

Professional players around the world experience varying workload demands due to differences in competitions, teams, and regional contexts, as highlighted by previous FIFPRO reports. These differences create unique challenges that affect player performance, well-being, career longevity and career opportunities.

This type of segmentation is also supported by data from the FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform, which suggests that the football industry is characterised by an uneven distribution of playing time. Top-performing players are used more often at club level than their peers and are also relied upon by their respective national teams on a regular basis.

In the '2023/2024 Annual Report', we introduced a segmentation analysis of the 1,500-player sample of the PWM platform by dividing them into four distinct groups based on their match load (see pyramid graphic). The objective was to systematically assess how their key workload metrics have evolved in recent years.

For this year's report, we applied the same, established framework to the statistics of the entire 2024/25 season. It is important to note that the analysis considered the 2024 season for leagues and competitions that follow calendar year scheduling (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, Korea Republic, United States, etc.). All competitive and friendly matches in club (senior only) and national team (senior and youth) competitions were included. Main segmentation results are summarized below.



2024/25 Segmentation Results

- 49% of the entire PWM player sampled belonged to either the 'High Load' or the 'Excessive Load' category based on their match load over the season.
- The main driver for both was the high number of international games for club/country. A quarter to a third of their match load was in international games that also often involved heavy travel load.
- Calendar congestion is still an issue: players in the 'Excessive Load' category had 37 back-to-back games in the season on average, almost one per week. In 'Limited Load', this was less than five.

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

‘Excessive Load’ of Different Player Profiles

As a function of the selection criteria, the ‘Excessive Load’ segment includes a high number of “elite” players who regularly play in several international tournaments and are important members of their respective national teams. Many in this group are among the most popular footballers in the world who command a large following and thus greatly contribute to the commercial value of any competition they are involved in. They are also often well-remunerated, which is, incidentally, one of the “counter-arguments” raised when the overload of players is mentioned.

However, excessive match load is not limited to this particular player type: the segment also includes a large number of players who are perhaps less well-known and do not play in the most popular leagues. Yet, their contributions are equally important for the viability and overall success of the sport.

This diversity of the ‘Excessive Load’ segment confirms that high workload affects players in many parts of the world and on several levels of the football pyramid. They might experience a similar level of match and travel load, but their environment to tackle these difficulties with could be vastly different (club and national team infrastructure, recovery options available, travel options, etc.)

To illustrate this point, we selected two players who both belonged to the ‘Excessive Load’ segment based on their 2024/25 season match load.

Bruno Fernandes

(Manchester United FC & Portugal)

Qazim Laçi

(AC Sparta Praha & Albania)

BRUNO FERNANDES	Player	QAZIM LAÇI
Midfielder	**Position**	Midfielder
30	**Age**	29
68 in total, of which: club (domestic) - 43 club (international) – 14 club (friendly) - 2 national team - 9	**Match appearances and breakdown** (2024/25)	**60 in total**, of which: club (domestic) - 36 club (international) – 14 club (friendly) - 0 national team - 10
71%	**Back-to-back appearance share** (24/25)	60%
26 days (below recommended minimum)	**Off-season break between EURO 2024 and start of 2024/25 season**	14 days (below recommended minimum)
61 million	**Estimated market value of player** (EURm, June 2025)	3 million
9,500,000	**Number of followers on Instagram** (July 2025)	43,600
15 million	**Estimated salary** (EUR, gross, annual)	< 1 million

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

WORKING TIME OF A PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLER

Leading European Club and National Team Player

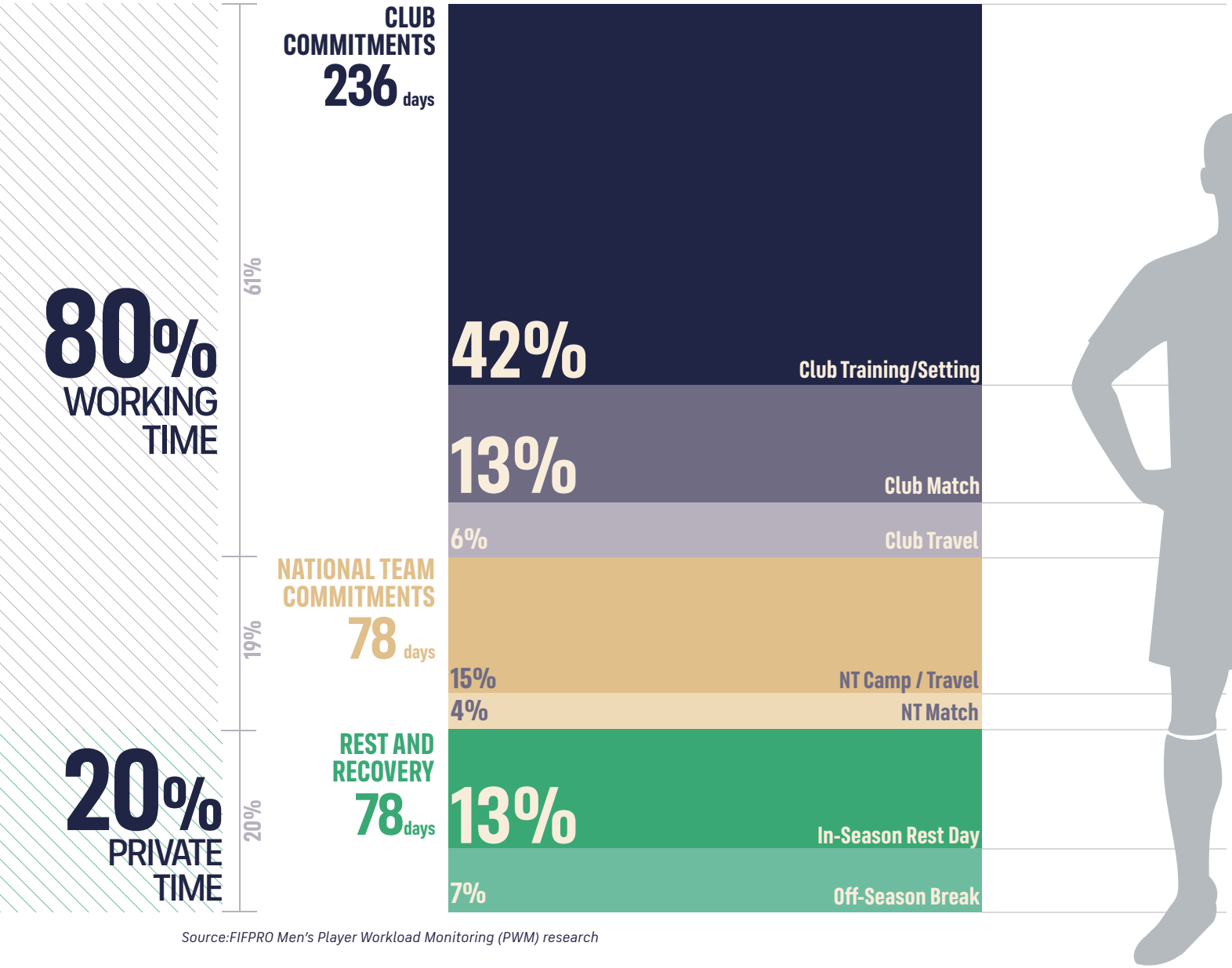
This analysis provides an in-depth examination of the working time commitments of a top-level footballer over the course of the 2023/24 and 2024/25 seasons. Focusing on a player competing at the highest level of European club football, it quantifies the total time dedicated to football-related activities, including training sessions, matchdays, travel, and national team duties.

By tracking this leading player's schedule across two full seasons, the goal is to shed light on the increasingly constrained time available for rest, recovery, and personal life.

2023/24: A season extending beyond 12 months

The player's 2023/24 season lasted 392 days, extended due to EURO 2024, highlighting the relentless demands on elite footballers. During this season, he spent 80% of his days in his working environment, including playing in 49 club matches, 17 national team games, alongside training, travel, and national team camps. The limited recovery window demonstrates how overlapping tournaments and extended club schedules reduce essential rest periods.

2023/24 Season (392-day period)



Source:FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

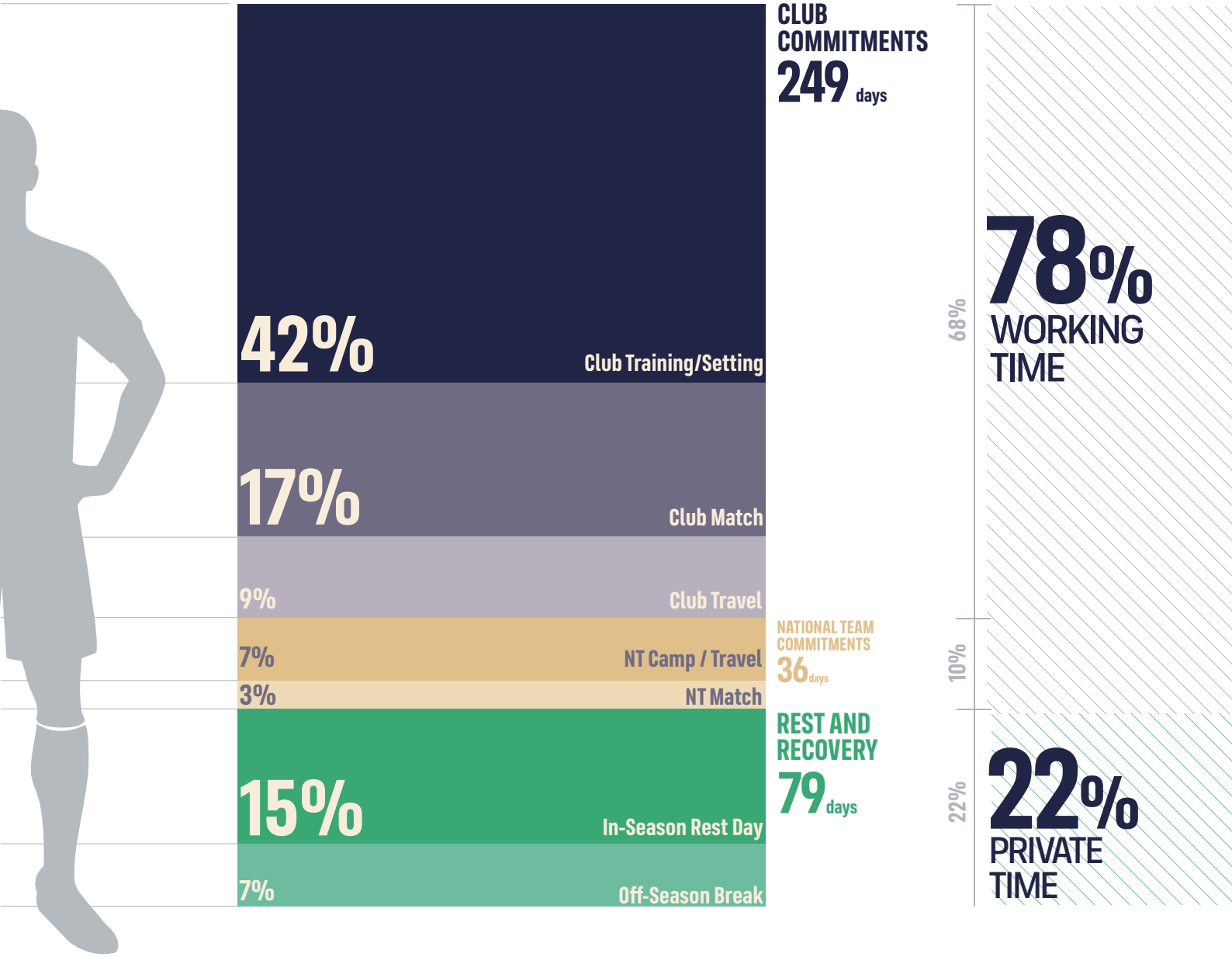
METHODOLOGY

Each day is categorized based on the primary activity or activities that took place. Given that football schedules often involve multiple commitments in a single day such as training and travel or match appearance and travel, our approach assigns the most demanding activity to each day. For example, if a day includes both playing a match and traveling back home, it is classified as a matchday.

2024/25: The impact of the Club World Cup

Following EURO 2024, off-season rest before the 2024/25 season was limited to 24 days, again below the four-week minimum. The season spanned 364 days, with the player engaged in working activities for 78% of the season. National team appearances lowered to 10, but club matches increased to 63 due to successful progress in multiple international club competitions, including the FIFA Club World Cup.

2024/25 Season (364-day period)



EXPERT'S VIEW
A NEW UEFA RESEARCH INITIATIVE ON PLAYER LOAD
COLLABORATIVE ACTION BY THE EUROPEAN CLUB ASSOCIATION, EUROPEAN LEAGUES & FIFPRO EUROPE TO ADDRESS THE PLAYER WORKLOAD CRISIS

JOACHIM WALLTIN
General Secretary, FIFPRO Europe

For years, FIFPRO Europe has sounded the alarm about the escalating demands placed on professional footballers. The expansion of competitions, congested calendars, and intensifying physical demands are threatening player health, career longevity, and the very quality of the game we all cherish. Today, we stand at a pivotal moment—one that signals a shift in how football's stakeholders approach player welfare.

> **UEFA's announcement of a comprehensive new initiative, developed in partnership with the European Club Association, European Leagues, and FIFPRO Europe, represents more than just another study.**

It embodies a recognition that has been long overdue: player workload and health and safety concerns cannot be sidelined in the pursuit of commercial growth and competitive expansion.

Scientific Evidence Base
While we need urgent and immediate action this initiative's two-phase approach establishes a parallel track to ongoing political discussions – both are relevant to address this crisis.

What sets this initiative apart is its commitment to scientific methodology. This study's emphasis on peer-reviewed research and independent expert analysis ensures that recommendations will be grounded in robust evidence rather than institutional bias.

A common understanding of what 'load' means to different stakeholders – players, coaches, medical staff, and clubs – provides important foundations for a meaningful and ongoing dialogue based on shared definitions rather than competing interpretations.

A Holistic Vision for Player Welfare
Perhaps most importantly, this initiative recognizes that player load cannot be understood through a narrow lens. The multidisciplinary approach – examining not just physical demands but a holistic approach to workload and overall welfare – acknowledges that footballers are complete human beings whose wellbeing extends beyond mere physical capacity.

This perspective aligns with FIFPRO Europe's approach to holistic workload safeguards that go beyond the field of play. When we understand the full spectrum of factors affecting player load, we can develop policies that protect careers and performance while enhancing the quality of competition.

Immediate Action and Long-Term Scientific Understanding
While this is a significant collaborative milestone, FIFPRO Europe remains vigilant about implementation. The true test of this initiative will not only be in the quality of its research but in how effectively its recommendations are translated into concrete long-term policy changes.

However, we must be clear that long-term research cannot replace immediate player welfare needs. While we await comprehensive data analysis, there are common-sense safeguards that require no further study – such as for example protected mandatory rest periods between seasons and guaranteed re-training periods that allow players to rebuild after intensive competition periods.

These and other safeguards are fundamental protections that are based on established sports science principles and human physiology. The research must proceed alongside, implementing these basic welfare measures that we know are essential for player health and career longevity.

A New Chapter
This UEFA initiative represents a positive approach in player health and safety - one where player welfare is a central consideration in every decision. It demonstrates that when stakeholders choose collaboration over confrontation, and evidence over assumption, meaningful progress becomes possible.

FIFPRO Europe is proud to be part of this groundbreaking effort. Together, we have the opportunity to create a football ecosystem that thrives not by pushing players to their breaking point, but by finding the optimal balance between rest and elite performance.

04

REST & SEASON BREAKS:
2024/25 SEASON REVIEW

With competition calendars growing ever more congested, meaningful rest is continuing to shrink for an increasing amount of players. This chapter examines not only the shrinking off-season break periods but also the reduced re-training periods that follow, two factors that pose a significant threat to player health. Drawing on calendar data and trends from the 2024/25 season, we reveal how little true downtime players receive and how the match calendar undermines effective preparation during pre-season.

"People need to understand we're not machines. To deliver the level of play fans want – intense, competitive matches – we also need time to rest."

JULES KOUNDÉ
(FC BARCELONA & FRANCE)


FCB

04 / REST & SEASON BREAKS

INTRODUCTION

The 2024/25 season underscores growing concerns over the shrinking rest periods afforded to elite footballers, as expanded international tournaments and congested club calendars leave little time for genuine recovery. This chapter analyses the impact of major summer competitions, including the Euros, Copa América, and the new FIFA Club World Cup, on off-season breaks and retraining phases, highlighting the gap between medical recommendations and reality.

Through case studies, such as Rodri's three-year workload and injury trajectory, the chapter illustrates how short breaks and repeated calendar congestion compromise player health and performance.

Detailed working time analyses quantify football-related activities versus personal downtime, revealing the relentless pace of match play, travel, and training across consecutive seasons.

Finally, football's rest safeguards are compared with other major sports such as basketball, AFL, and baseball. This cross-sport lens examines how football's year-round calendar and workload safeguards compare to those in other major disciplines with established welfare protections, helping to frame the broader discussion around athlete recovery and scheduling reform.

MEDICAL CONSENSUS STATEMENTS REGARDING SEASON BREAKS

The following consensus statements outline key medical recommendations for managing player workload between competitive seasons. They emphasize the need for adequate recovery, a protected blackout period, and a structured return-to-play phase to safeguard athlete health and performance.

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

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

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

Click here to explore all 12 medical consensus statements.

Source: FIFPRO's 'Medical Position Statement on Minimum Player Workload Safeguards in Men's Professional Football' study (June 2025)

EXPERT'S VIEW

THE FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE OF REST BREAKS AND EFFECTIVE RE-TRAINING

DR. DARREN BURGESS
Chair, FIFPRO High-Performance Advisory Network
Director of Performance, Juventus FC

Rest and recovery should be considered essential contributors to sporting performance. However, today's increasingly congested global calendar continues to erode the time players have to switch-off at the end of a season and to prepare properly for the next. The result is an increasingly unsustainable cycle that places strain on bodies and minds, increases injury risk, and ultimately threatens to reduce player availability for clubs and national teams alike.

Worryingly, players are becoming more vocal as this constant load takes its toll. Rodri, for example, has admitted to carrying fatigue before suffering successive injuries last year. Young players such as Chelsea's Levi Colwill have had their development interrupted by injury setbacks. These cases highlight what happens when the necessary rhythm of recovery, rest, and gradual reloading in pre-season is compromised by the demands of summer tournaments, international fixtures, and commercial tours.

Other sports provide useful comparison. The NBA guarantees players a genuine off-season period lasting several months, while rugby, AFL and cricket have introduced minimum rest windows to protect both health and performance. Football, in contrast, often leaves leading players with only a brief pause between one high-intensity competition and the next, offering little chance to reset physically or mentally.

After the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, for example, our medical team at Liverpool observed the Spanish national team players returning from their World Cup winning exploits in quite a fatigued state. However, due to a perceived lack of squad depth these players played the majority of early season games, producing inferior physical match outputs compared to the previous season.

The principle is simple: proper off-season rest enables the body to heal and the mind to refresh. Pre-season training then allows workload to be built progressively, creating the resilience needed for the challenges of a long campaign. When this process is shortened or skipped, the likelihood of injury rises sharply, leaving the game without many of its most marketable and influential players.

> **For football to protect its most valuable assets, the players, reform is needed. Establishing minimum standards for both rest and pre-season preparation would not weaken the game – it would strengthen it by ensuring that those on the pitch are fit, available, and able to perform at their best.**

Other sports have shown that safeguarding recovery is possible. Football must follow suit.

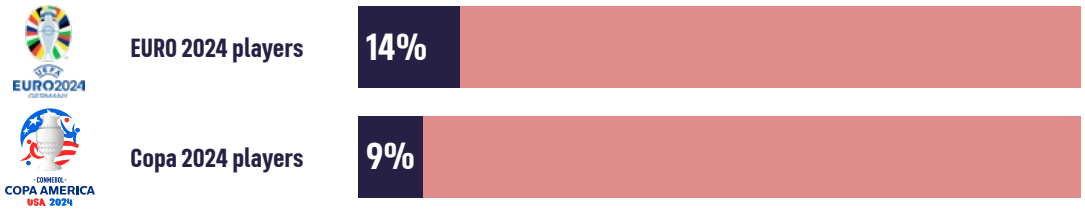
POST-TOURNAMENT RECOVERY: EURO 2024 AND COPA AMERICA 2024

Summer tournaments, be it for club or country, often inhibit the rest and recovery period of players between seasons. The impact on participating players was evident after last summer's two major tournaments, the 2024 UEFA European Championship and the 2024 CONMEBOL Copa América.

In this section, we present an analysis of the off-season break impact for European "Big Five" league players who participated in either tournament.

Therefore, the focus was on the interval between the 2023/24 and 2024/25 seasons for players who started the latter season for a club playing in either the English, French, German, Italian, or Spanish top division. In total, we had 253 individual players in the Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform's sample who fit this criteria. This analysis highlights **the significant impact a major tournament can have on players' off-season rest periods and re-training periods.**

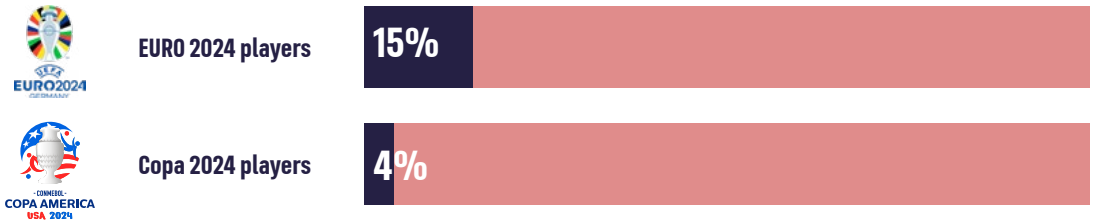
What percentage of players, who play their club football in the top-5 European leagues, received minimum 28 days for their OFF-SEASON BREAK after the summer tournament?



As underlined by medical consensus statements, it is essential that players receive a minimum of four weeks (28 days) of rest between seasons. Importantly, all of this period must be spent outside the work environment of clubs and national teams. This is crucial for adequate physical and mental recovery.

Our analysis shows that only 14% of EURO 2024 players and an even smaller share, only 9% of Copa America 2024 participants from our sample had an off-season break that reached the recommended minimum length. The average length of break afforded to EURO 2024 players was little over 23 days, while analysed Copa participants had to report to training at their "Big Five" club less than 22 days after the tournament ended for them.

What percentage of players, who play their club football in the top-5 European leagues, received minimum 28 days for their PRE-SEASON TRAINING after the summer tournament?



According to scientific recommendations, players require a minimum four-week re-training period ("pre-season") following the off-season break before returning to competitive action. Friendly games during this time are considered part of it, supporting players to build match fitness. The re-training period enables them to prepare their body for the long season ahead and ultimately guard against injury.

The re-training period assessment, much like the off-season analysis, highlights that the **vast majority of the assessed players from EURO 2024 and Copa America 2024 did not benefit from the minimum re-training phase before their 2024/25 campaigns**. In our sample, just 15% of EURO participants and an even lower 4% of Copa America players had a retraining period of sufficient length ahead of the new season.

In addition, the gap to the recommended length of re-training was even higher in this case. On average, analysed UEFA EURO players had only 19 days for re-training before they played competitive matches again. For Copa América players, this figure was even lower at 15.5 days.

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

PLAYER CASE STUDY - RODRI

EXTREME WORKLOAD AND LIMITED REST

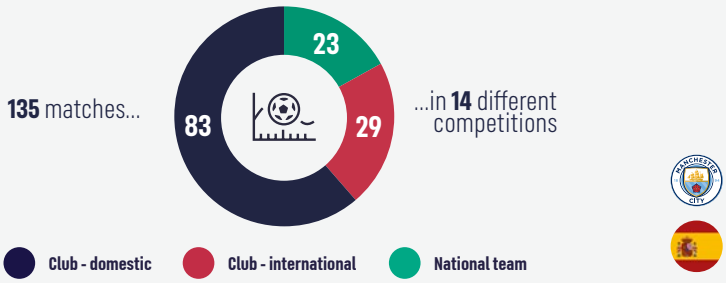
Rodri stands out as a prime example of a footballer facing an exceptionally high workload, with the midfielder having played more than 60 matches in both the 2022/23 and 2023/24 seasons, consistently exceeding FIFPRO's recommended threshold of 55 matches per season for elite players. Such intense scheduling significantly limited his retraining and recovery opportunities between seasons, increasing the risk of fatigue and injury. This remarkable run of continuous match action came to an abrupt halt early in the 2024/25 season, when he suffered a season-ending injury, following an injury disrupted off-season break and minimal re-training period, providing a clear illustration of the urgent need for improved workload management and player health protections.

In the 2023/24 season, Rodri's relentless workload took a heavy toll. After navigating a congested calendar of domestic, European, and international fixtures, he sustained a hamstring injury in the EURO 2024 final, sidelining him for 6-weeks. With a significantly reduced pre-season period, and the league season already underway, he returned to competitive action in the Premier League and suffered a serious ACL injury. The injury ruled him out for 47 games over a 235-day absence, disrupting both his club and international duties. Following months of intensive rehabilitation, he returned in advance of the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup. However, Rodri then sustained a subsequent injury, again disrupting his already shortened pre-season training period ahead of the 2025/26 season.

Insufficient Rest, Maximum Risk

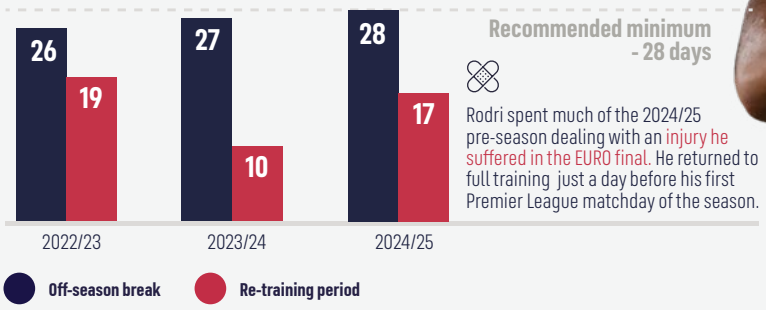
High match loads

Combined match appearances in 2022/23 and 2023/24



Limited rest

Off-season breaks and re-training periods before the seasons

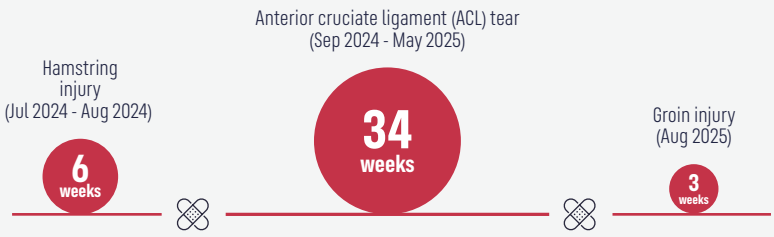


Recommended minimum - 28 days

Rodri spent much of the 2024/25 pre-season dealing with an injury he suffered in the EURO final. He returned to full training just a day before his first Premier League matchday of the season.

Injury setbacks

Injuries since January 2024 and time missed



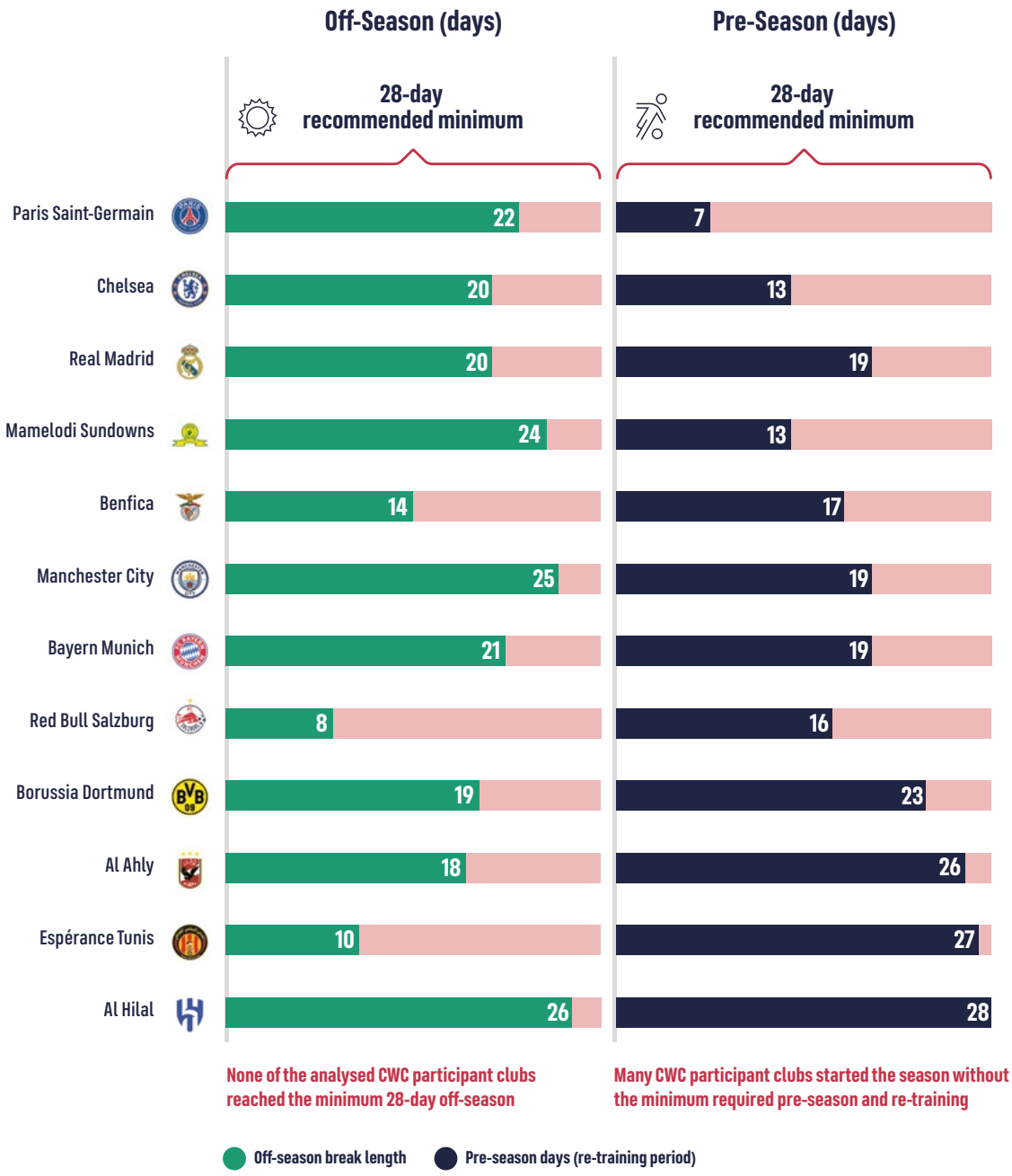
Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

FIFA CLUB WORLD CUP 2025: IMPACT ON REST & RECOVERY THREATENS PLAYER HEALTH

The 2025 FIFA Club World Cup epitomised the escalating risks created by reckless calendar expansion. The tournament intensified an already overloaded international match calendar, increasing workload demands and preventing effective rest and recovery between seasons, inevitably increasing the risks of injury over the season ahead.

PLAYER HEALTH THREATENED DUE TO REDUCED REST & RE-TRAINING PERIODS

Post-tournament rest and re-training were severely inhibited for participating players



Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research
Note: Liga MX clubs were not included, as the Club World Cup took place after their pre-season.

Off-Season Break:
The day following a player's final match is not considered part of the off-season break, as it may involve travel or other club-related duties. Therefore, the off-season break is defined as the number of days between final matchday plus one and the day the player returns to pre-season training, excluding both of those days.

Pre-Season (Re-Training Period):
Re-training period is defined as the number of days from the first day of pre-season training up to and including the day before the first competitive match of the new season. This period covers all preparation activities, including physical conditioning, tactical training, friendly matches, and other club-related duties ahead of official competition.

None of the clubs participating in the Club World Cup immediately following their previous season met the recommended 28-day off-season break. Austrian club Red Bull Salzburg resumed training just 8 days after their tournament ended to prepare for UEFA Champions League qualifiers, while Tunisian side Espérance Tunis had only 10 days before beginning preparations for the Tunisian Super Cup. Portuguese club Benfica fared only slightly better, with 14 days off before starting training for the Portuguese Super Cup.

This lack of recovery time was further compounded by shortened re-training periods, as most clubs fell far short of the recommended minimum 28-day re-training window: Paris Saint-Germain had just 7 days, Chelsea and Mamelodi Sundowns each had 13 days, while clubs like Bayern Munich, Manchester City, and Real Madrid had less than three weeks.

Faced with the constraints of overlapping competitions and new season fast approaching, clubs were effectively forced into a trade-off between facilitating player rest and initiating pre-season training in preparation for the new season. Taken together, these examples illustrate the growing strain on players and clubs forced to navigate congested calendars with inadequate rest and preparation.

Al Hilal withdraws from the Saudi Super Cup over player welfare concerns

Al Hilal's demanding 2025 schedule and logistical challenges around the Club World Cup and domestic competitions led the club to decide not to participate in the Saudi Super Cup. Al Hilal advanced to the quarter-finals of the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup, opening against Real Madrid and playing their final match on 4 July. Due to flight constraints, the squad remained in Orlando for three extra days after elimination. In an official letter to the Saudi Arabian Football Federation (SAFF), **the club cited the extended stay and tight calendar as reasons for their decision not to participate in the 2025 Saudi Super Cup.** The draw was held on 19 June, just a day after their Club World Cup opener, and the tournament was later scheduled for Hong Kong. Participation would have left players with only 21 days of off-season rest, below the 28-day minimum required by clause 5.6 of SAFF's Professionalism and Player Status Regulations. Al Hilal also highlighted that these conditions delayed the start of their pre-season, placing them at a disadvantage compared to domestic rivals.

PRIORITISING PLAYER HEALTH & PERFORMANCE: OFF-SEASON BREAK LENGTHS COMPARED ACROSS SPORTS

Cross-sports comparison is particularly relevant given the growing debate around player overload in football. Unlike many other sports with defined off-seasons and more consistent competition structures, elite-level footballers, especially those competing in both international club competitions and national team fixtures, face year-round calendars. The modern football season includes not only domestic league and cup matches, but also international breaks, continental tournaments, and newly expanded competitions such as the FIFA Club World Cup. These **overlapping obligations result in long working periods, short off-season breaks, and significant international travel.** This analysis aims to put these recovery challenges in context by comparing off-season lengths with those in other high-performance sports.

A meaningful and comparable indicator is the length of the off-season break, a vital period for physical and mental recovery. In most major sports, off-season durations are clearly defined and strictly observed. For example, NBA, MLB, and AFL athletes typically receive three to four months of structured off-season, protected by collective agreements and built into the annual schedule as non-negotiable safeguards for player welfare.

In professional football, medical experts and coaches set a minimum off-season break of 28 days to allow for physical and mental recovery. In addition, a minimum re-training period of 28 days is considered necessary before players return to competitive matches, ensuring they can safely rebuild fitness and reduce injury risk.

Extended breaks in other disciplines are not incidental but fundamental to player welfare. They are built into league calendars and safeguarded through collective agreements. The typical scheduling in these sports, with no overlapping competitions, allows for longer recovery periods throughout the season, providing crucial time for rest, preparation, and injury prevention.


Wilson
LA

OFF-SEASON BREAK LENGTH ACROSS MAJOR SPORTS

Leading footballers receive notably shorter off-season break periods than counterparts in other sports

OFF-SEASON LENGTH IN WEEKS

Top European Club & National Team Player

3 WEEKS

NBA Finalist

14 WEEKS

Non-Playoffs

23 WEEKS

> If you explain this to people in the US with the NBA and the NFL, they won't understand it.

THIBAUT COURTOIS
(REAL MADRID & BELGIUM)

Source:
FIFPRO Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research.

Note: analysis is based on the 2024/25 or 2024 seasons for all sports. Off-season is defined as the period between seasons spent entirely without club or national team (work) commitments.

> "I always use NBA as an example. They play 80 games in a few months but then have four months off. You can regenerate. The problem here is that it is full on and after we have three weeks off.
>
> **PEP GUARDIOLA**
> (MANCHESTER CITY, MANAGER)

Grand Finalist

14 WEEKS

Non-Playoffs

17 WEEKS

World Series Finalist

15 WEEKS

Non-Playoffs

20 WEEKS

05

TRAVEL LOAD & RECOVERY:
2024/25 SEASON REVIEW

With relentless cross-border travel layered onto an already congested match calendar, players face recovery conditions that are far from adequate. Long journeys, time-zone shifts, and short turnarounds between fixtures place significant physical and mental strain on players. This chapter examines how travel demands undermine recovery and performance, highlighting the urgent need for more coordinated calendar planning, minimum safeguards, and responsible governance to safeguard player health and performance.

"I honestly think it's a dangerous thing. Last week we played City, and I think they played again two days later - that's too much."

JURRIËN TIMBER
(ARSENAL FC & NETHERLANDS)


Emirates
ETIHAD
AFC

05 / TRAVEL LOAD & RECOVERY

INTRODUCTION

Modern players face escalating international travel demands as calendar expansion now requires extensive travel together with minimal recovery time. This includes increasingly short recovery periods between matches and long journeys. Such patterns of travel, especially across multiple continents and time zones, create cumulative physiological stresses that can increase injury risks, undermine performance, disrupt sleep and recovery, and pose long-term risks to player welfare.

This chapter presents player case studies that highlight the immense travel loads and short recovery times commonly placed on leading footballers. It also includes a comparative analysis that ranks the top three players from each FIFPRO member region according to their total accumulated international (cross-border) travel distance during the 2024/25 season.

MEDICAL CONSENSUS STATEMENTS REGARDING TRAVEL AND RECOVERY

The following consensus statements outline key medical recommendations for managing travel-related workload and recovery. They emphasize the need to account for travel fatigue and jet lag, provide adequate rest after long-haul flights, and ensure players are fully recovered before resuming training or competition to safeguard health and performance.

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

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

Click here to explore all 12 medical consensus statements.

Source: FIFPRO's 'Medical Position Statement on Minimum Player Workload Safeguards in Men's Professional Football' study (June 2025)


COBUS 3000

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL LOAD

Top 3 players with the highest international (cross-border) travel distance by region

Region	Rank	Player name	Club	Nationality	International distance traveled (km)	Time spent with international travel (hours)	No. of international (cross-border) trips
ASIA & OCEANIA 	1	MATHEW RYAN			169,087	217.7	23
	2	MARKO STAMENIC			167,260	215.4	23
	3	BEN WAINE			156,748	198.4	11
SOUTH AMERICA 	1	ENZO FERNANDEZ			149,010	194.8	29
	2	MANUEL UGARTE			135,778	178.7	30
	3	MOISÉS CAICEDO			134,134	175.6	27
NORTH & CENTRAL AMERICA 	1	FRANCISCO CALVO			128,985	166.2	18
	2	CÉSAR MONTES			119,661	153.0	13
	3	MATT TURNER			96,778	125.6	16
AFRICA 	1	ANDRÉ ONANA			127,148	169.0	33
	2	KALIDOU KOULIBALY			109,816	145.4	27
	3	TEBOHO MOKOENA			109,759	142.3	18
EUROPE 	1	RUBEN NEVES			87,827	116.4	22
	2	ARDA GÜLER			83,048	113.2	30
	3	LUKA MODRIĆ			80,422	111.2	34

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

This analysis ranks three players from every FIFPRO member region with the highest international travel load accumulated throughout the 2024/25 season.

A common feature among all players is that they either belong to European clubs or play for a club that is based on a different continent from their home nation. This leads to excessive travel load whenever they are called up to national team duty and have to traverse long distances for qualifiers or tournaments without sufficient consideration for recovery before their next match.

It shall be noted that travel load is not simply about the distance or the time. These trips cross several time zones, and the players often do not get enough time to acclimate to local time zone. In addition, long flights can be physically draining, regardless of the conditions.

PLAYER CASE STUDY – ANDRÉ ONANA

BALANCING CLUB, COUNTRY, AND RELENTLESS TRAVEL

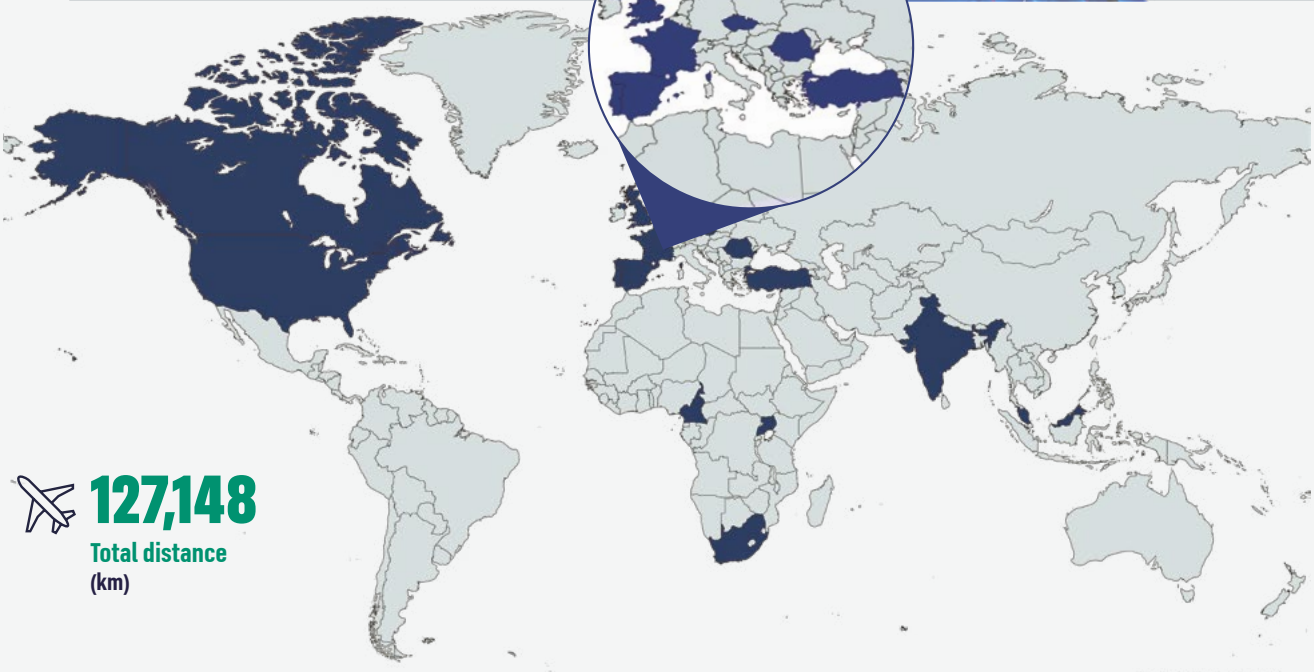
Over the course of the 2024/25 season, Manchester United and Cameroon goalkeeper André Onana experienced a significant travel burden due to his commitments at both club and international level. His accumulated international (cross-border) travel distance reached 127,148 kilometres across 33 separate trips, translating to approximately 169 hours spent in transit, equivalent to over a full week in the air. In total, he crossed 69 time zones, underscoring the cumulative physiological stress associated with frequent long-haul travel.

Breaking this down, national team duty accounted for 66,740 kilometres over 12 trips, with nearly 87 hours of flight time. These appearances were spread across AFCON qualification and FIFA World Cup qualifiers, typically requiring travel across Africa, often with limited recovery windows and logistical challenges such as multi-leg journeys or late returns to club duties.

Meanwhile, club-level commitments added a nearly equal load, with 60,407 kilometres covered in 21 trips, also amounting to roughly 82 hours of air travel. Manchester United's participation in the UEFA Europa League, with group and knockout stage fixtures across the continent, contributed to this. Onana's season also included two demanding transcontinental tours: a pre-season tour of the United States starting in late July 2024, and a post-season tour immediately following the end of the Premier League campaign.

This case illustrates the increasingly blurred line between competitive and commercial obligations in elite football and how the burden of travel, especially for players representing both club and country, can undermine efforts to safeguard player welfare.

Countries visited in 2024/25 and overall travel load



127,148
Total distance (km)

33
Total trips

169
Total time (hours)

69
Number of time zones crossed

13
Different countries visited for club and national team commitments

Source:FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

PLAYER CASE STUDY – MOISÉS CAICEDO

CROSS-CONTINENTAL TRAVEL WITH MINIMAL RECOVERY

For many professional footballers, extensive travel across multiple time zones is a routine part of their career. This can adversely affect both their performance and well-being, especially when they must play immediately after long flights with minimal recovery time. The demands of national team duties, such as FIFA World Cup qualifiers, often create uneven workloads among players, particularly for South American internationals based in Europe, who face frequent trans-continental journeys.

On average, CONMEBOL World Cup qualifiers require round-trip journeys exceeding 12,000 kilometres. Across a season, in combination with club travel, this can amount to players accumulating 100,000 kilometres of international travel. Competing competition organisers rarely consider this important issue. FIFA mandated international windows for national team matches, typically lasting nine days, usually features two matches in quick succession. These dedicated periods typically begin just a day after club matches. Similarly, afterwards, players are often expected to be available to represent their clubs within 48-72 hours.

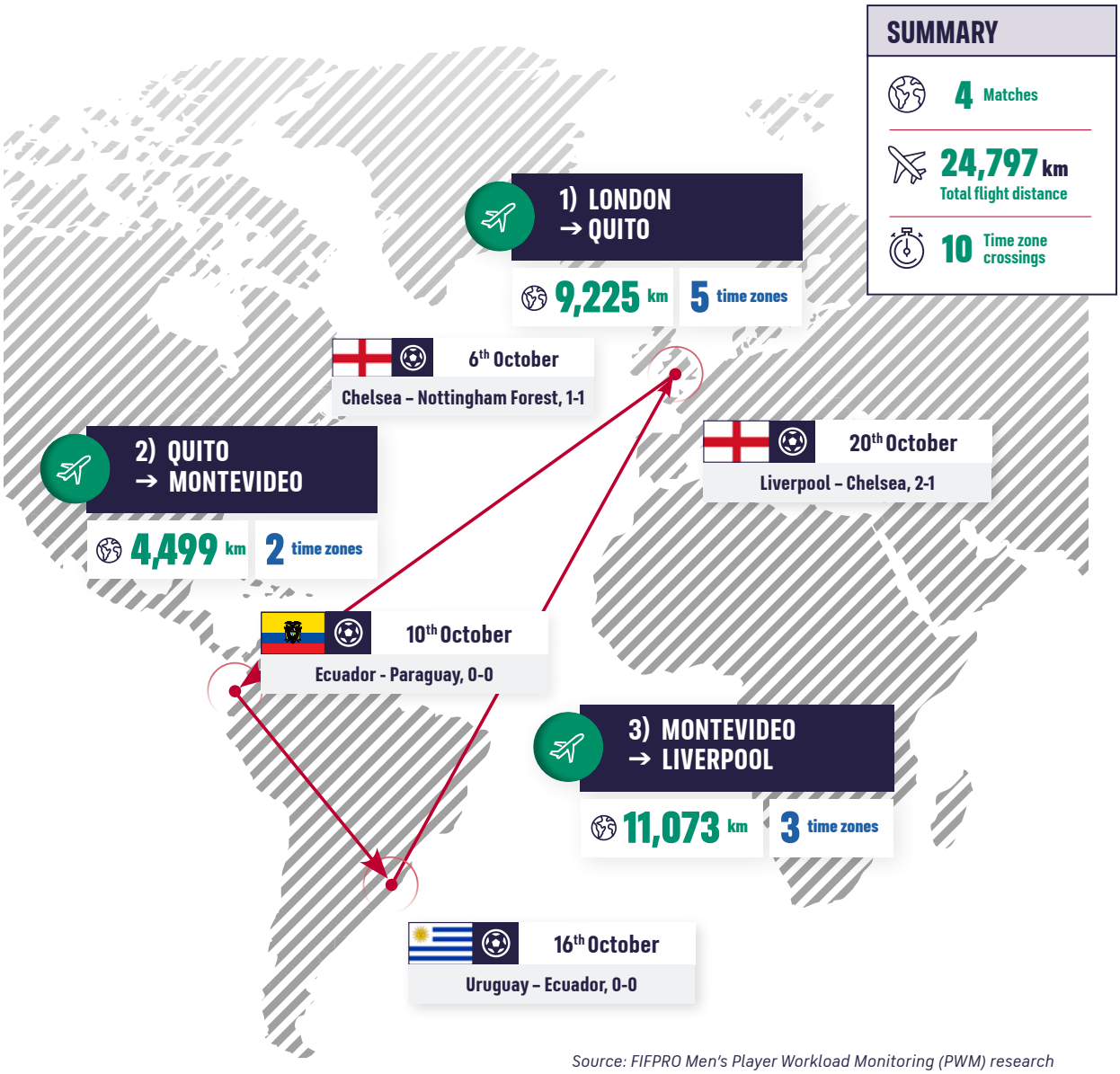
A prime example of this issue is Moisés Caicedo's autumn 2024 schedule. On 6 October, Caicedo played 90 minutes in the English Premier League, with the international window starting the following day. Just 102 hours after his match in London, Caicedo played another 90 minutes in a World Cup qualifier against Paraguay, despite having travelled 9,225 kilometres between the two games shortly before. For the second match, he had slightly more time to recover (120 hours) but had to travel another 4,499 kilometres from Ecuador to Uruguay for it.

Despite covering nearly 25,000 kilometres during the international window, Caicedo was back in action for his next Premier League match against Liverpool FC on 20 October. **Despite the excessive travel load, he still started this match and played another full 90 minutes.** Over this period spanning 14 days, Caicedo played a total of 360 minutes across two continents and three countries, with an average recovery time of 110.8 hours, while flying more than half the length of the Equator.

This example **highlights how certain players become indispensable for both their club and national teams, often leading to heavy workloads without adequate rest.**

Cross-continental travel with minimal recovery over 14-days in October 2024

(Flight distance and number of time zones crossed shown for all trips)



Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

Caicedo's Congested Calendar (5-21 October 2024)

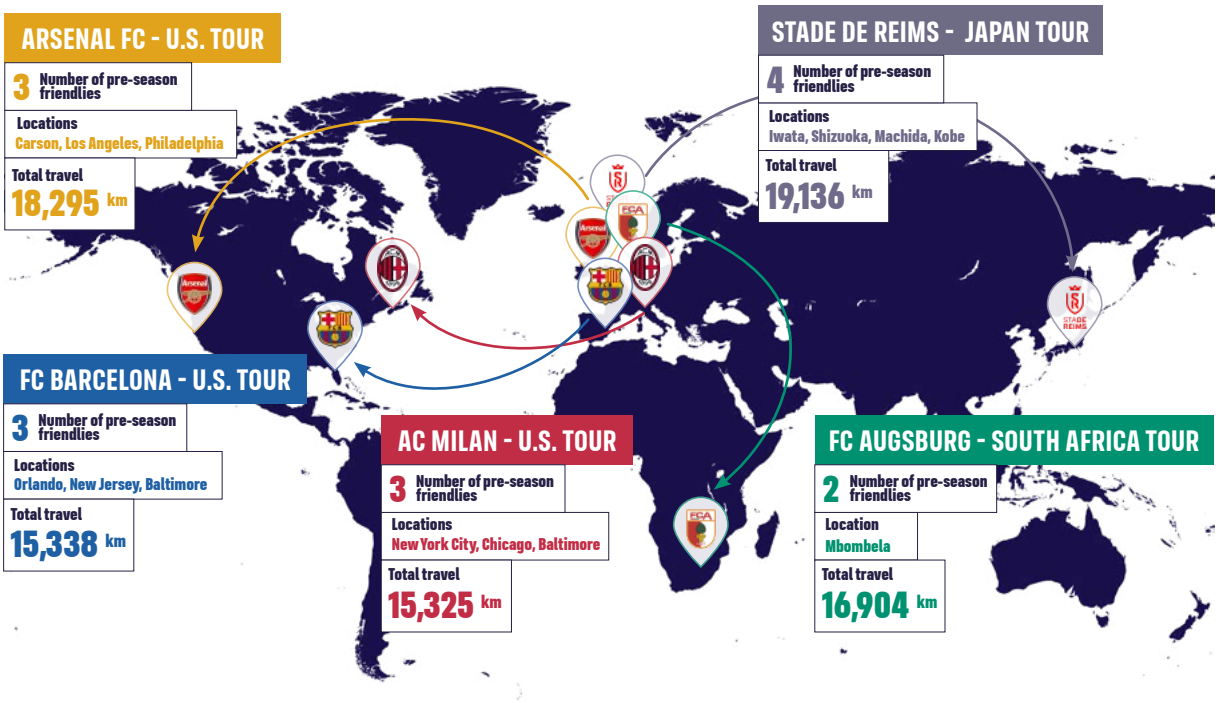
THE ADDITIONAL DEMANDS OF GLOBAL TOURS

From a historical perspective, international tours are not a new phenomenon within the footballing landscape. However, the ever-increasing commercial demands placed on clubs mean that both pre-season and post-season tours have become a regular and common event in the football calendar. Where pre-season was once primarily about fitness, tactical preparation, and team cohesion, it has now become heavily shaped by brand expansion, sponsorship commitments, and revenue generation. Clubs travel across continents to stage games in front of international audiences, giving fans thousands of miles away a rare opportunity to see their favourite players while also helping to build new markets and strengthen ties with global partners.

Post-season tours, meanwhile, add an additional layer of workload, taking place immediately after long campaigns. While these tours can generate significant commercial value, they inevitably raise questions about player welfare: how does such extensive travel affect recovery, limit training time, and potentially undermine both short-term performance and long-term player health in the context of an already saturated football calendar?

2024/25 PRE-SEASON TOURS

Global pre-season tours and the growing burden on players



The 2024/25 pre-season calendar underlined a potential conflict between commercial imperatives and sporting priorities. Clubs such as FC Barcelona, Arsenal, AC Milan, FC Augsburg, and Stade de Reims undertook long-haul trips to the United States, Asia, and Africa, covering tens of thousands of kilometres in just a few weeks.

FC Barcelona, Arsenal FC, and AC Milan all structured their pre-season programs around tours of the United States, each scheduling three of their five matches there. For Barcelona, the trip involved more than **15,300 km** of travel, while Arsenal's journey across multiple American cities added up to nearly **18,300 km**. AC Milan also crossed the Atlantic twice, covering **15,325 km** during their trip. These tours not only placed players under demanding travel schedules but also involved commercial activities, media appearances, and promotional events alongside the matches themselves.

Stade de Reims faced the most punishing itinerary in terms of distance. As part of an eight-game program, the club travelled over **19,200 km** to Japan, playing four matches in cities such as Iwata, Machida, and Kobe. The decision to tour Japan was closely linked to the presence of Japanese players in the squad, highlighting how individual player markets can shape a club's commercial and sporting calendar. Even FC Augsburg, without the global reach of Europe's elite clubs, undertook significant travel, logging more than **16,900 km** for two matches in South Africa during an eight-game pre-season schedule.

2024/25 POST-SEASON TOURS

Extending the regular season

MANCHESTER UNITED FC 2024/25 POST-SEASON TOUR

2 Matches

22,778 km
Total distance travelled

14 Total number of timezones crossed

Locations
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
vs Asean All-Stars

Hong Kong, China
vs Hong Kong NT

RB LEIPZIG 2024/25 POST-SEASON TOUR

1 Match

20,232 km
Total distance travelled

10 Total number of timezones crossed

Location
Bragança Paulista, Brazil
vs Santos FC

The commercial value of additional matches is not limited to pre-season tours. In recent years, post-season tours have become a regular feature, extending the workload and working time for players immediately after the conclusion of domestic campaigns.

Following the 2024/25 season, clubs such as Manchester United FC and RB Leipzig undertook long-haul tours to engage fans and commercial partners abroad. **Only 3 hours** after their final Premier League fixture against Aston Villa, the Manchester United squad travelled **10,640 km** to Kuala Lumpur for a friendly against the ASEAN All-Stars, before flying a further **2,525 km** to Hong Kong for another exhibition game, then **9,618 km** back to Manchester. Selected players, including André Onana, Diogo Dalot, and Harry Maguire, also made a commercial stop in Mumbai, adding an additional **3,598 km** flight from Kuala Lumpur.

RB Leipzig undertook a transatlantic journey to Brazil, travelling over a total of **20,000 km** for a match against Santos FC in Bragança Paulista. The tour extended beyond the on-pitch fixture, including a training camp at RB Bragantino's academy, public training sessions, community initiatives, media engagements, and collaborations with Red Bull and its athletes. Designed to combine sporting preparation with commercial, promotional, and fan engagement activities, the tour reflects the increasing globalization of club football and the growing demands placed on players outside traditional match obligations.

NEW TREND: MOVING DOMESTIC MATCHES ABROAD

The globalization of football is not limited to pre-season and post-season tours. Clubs are increasingly exploring the possibility of staging domestic league matches in international markets to grow their fanbase and commercial opportunities.

For example, AC Milan's home fixture against Como in the Serie A could be played in Perth, Australia, **13,702 km** from Milan, after Italy's football federation (FIGC) approved the move. Similarly, the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) has approved a request for December's La Liga fixture between Villarreal CF and FC Barcelona to be played in Miami, **7,400 km** from Villarreal's home stadium.

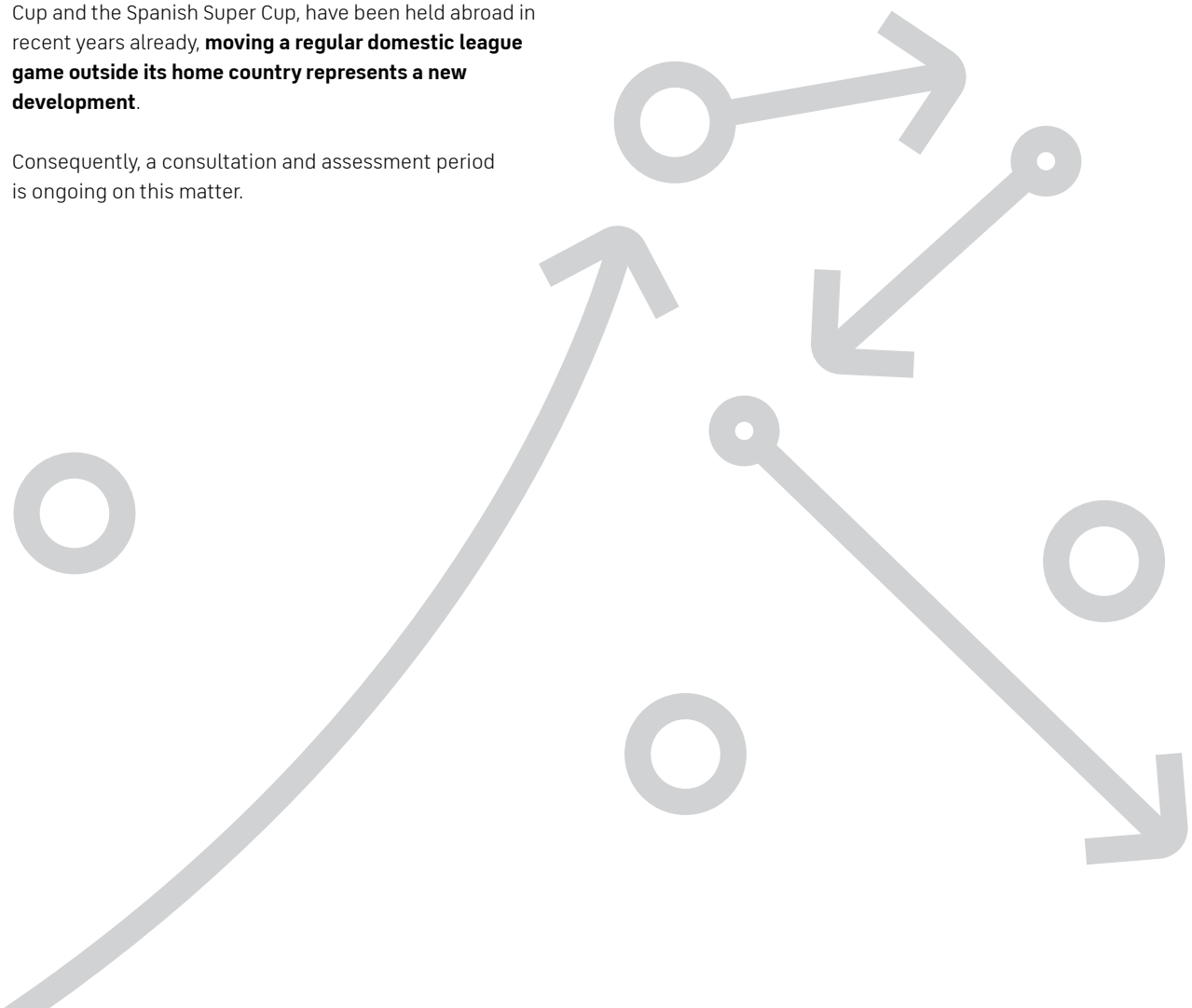
While these initiatives can generate commercial benefits, they also pose challenges for player welfare, domestic playing markets, local fans and the cultural fabric of the game in Europe. By contrast, the English Premier League and Bundesliga have confirmed that they have no plans to stage top-flight matches overseas.

While other domestic games, such as the Italian Super Cup and the Spanish Super Cup, have been held abroad in recent years already, **moving a regular domestic league game outside its home country represents a new development**.

Consequently, a consultation and assessment period is ongoing on this matter.

From a player perspective, **long-haul flights, multiple time zone changes, and minimal recovery time before the next domestic game-week can disrupt training routines, intensify jet lag, and limit preparation for competitive fixtures**. Players inevitably face increased physical and mental fatigue, which raises the risk of injury and can compromise on pitch performance.

As football continues to globalize, finding the right balance between commercial ambitions, the health, wellbeing, and performance of players is becoming one of the sport's most pressing challenges for the balance and calibration of the match calendar.



International Relocation of Upcoming Serie A and LaLiga Matches
Highlighting jet lag and travel challenges

AC MILAN EXAMPLE

1 February 2026
Matchday 23: Bologna FC - AC Milan
Bologna, Italy

8 February 2026
Matchday 24: AC Milan - Como
Perth, Australia

15 February 2026
Matchday 25: Pisa SC - AC Milan
Pisa, Italy

27,022 km
Roundtrip distance between Milan, Italy and Perth, Australia

35 hours
Total flight time

14
Total timezones crossed

VILLARREAL CF EXAMPLE

14 December 2025
Matchday 16: Levante UD - Villarreal CF
Valencia, Spain

21 December 2025
Matchday 17: Villarreal CF - FC Barcelona
Miami, United States

4 January 2026
Matchday 18: Elche CF - Villarreal FC
Elche, Spain

14,800 km
Roundtrip distance between Villarreal, Spain and Miami, United States

19 hours
Total flight time

12
Total timezones crossed

06

EXTREME HEAT & MATCH CONDITIONS:
2024/25 SEASON REVIEW

Players routinely face extreme heat and challenging environments, testing limits far beyond optimal conditions. This chapter reviews the impact of high temperatures and adverse weather on player safety and performance, examining recent fixtures where conditions have sparked concerns for athlete well-being.

"The heat is incredible. The truth is, playing at that time is very dangerous. The speed of play is not the same. Everything becomes very slow. Let's hope for next year they change the times so, more than anything, the football continues to be nice and attractive."

ENZO FERNÁNDEZ
(CHELSEA FC & ARGENTINA)


ENZO
8

06 / EXTREME HEAT & MATCH CONDITIONS

EXTREME HEAT – PLAYER LOAD AND RISK MITIGATION

Extreme heat can provide severe challenges to players' and participants' safety and health. It is particularly the extreme heat alongside the physical demands of football, which mean that players face unique challenges in this context. It is therefore important that specific responses need to be formulated, through cooperation between management, players and their collective representatives.

In the specific working environment of football players safety & health refers to a wide range of workforce issues that impact their health and well-being. Equally workplace safety and health are critical to ensure the integrity and sustainability of competitions. In this context, the management of extreme weather conditions and heat mitigation are central to matchday operations and overall management aspects of football competitions. This includes commercial aspects such as relations with broadcasters and sponsors as well as crowd management aspects such as travel and safety requirements for fans and supporters.

While many workers are exposed to increasing risks due to extreme heat, **athletes do work in a particularly physically demanding job in which they face unique challenges for which specific responses need to be formulated**, through cooperation between competition management, players and their collective representatives. Worker involvement is an essential component of occupational safety and health (OSH), particularly in high-stakes, fast-paced environments such as professional football.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND FOOTBALL

Climate change and the extreme weather it brings will influence our ability to participate in and spectate football without discrimination for regions, people, or policies. The global footprint of football will leave it particularly exposed to the impacts of climate change as each region of the Earth will experience its impacts differently. Areas of focus for how climate change will manifest itself in football would include the following: **temperatures, air quality, precipitation and flooding, and natural disasters.** While climate change is a pressing concern that football needs to respond to immediately, it is a concern for which we can prepare.

HEAT GUIDELINES VS COLLECTIVELY AGREED STANDARDS

The International Football Association Board (IFAB), the independent guardians of football rules, currently does not have standards for managing extreme weather and heat during competition. Although guidelines on the use of drinks and cooling breaks are outlined in the laws, it is the responsibility of the competition organisers to determine the weather conditions that warrant these breaks. The FIFA heat guidelines indicate that a Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) value above 32°C results in extreme risk of heat-related illnesses and therefore cooling breaks at approximately 30 minutes in each half of a match should be implemented as a mitigation strategy, or the match should be delayed or postponed.

Although the FIFA guidelines are guiding principles in the professional football industry for many continental confederations and national leagues, they have not been updated in nearly 20 years.

For the specific context of professional football, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) heat guidelines are often used as the default policy. Still, these seem less protective than guidelines in other sports or from countries traditionally exposed to extreme hot conditions.

Specifically, agreed protocols in national competitions set for example a higher protective standard for players and the competition. The discrepancy between existing protocols that are in some cases agreed between leagues, experts and player unions and the existing FIFA standards for the upcoming competitions such as the FIFA Club World Cup 2026 and 2030 (as well as other competitions at national or international level), are a current concern that requires attention as competition policies need to adapt to a warming planet.

EXPERT'S VIEW

ATHLETES ARE WORKERS; THEY NEED PROTECTION FROM THE HEAT

MANAL AZZI
Senior Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Specialist,
International Labour Organization (ILO)

Heat is a silent killer threatening millions of workers worldwide. Every year, over 2.4 billion workers face rising temperatures and harmful sun exposure, leading to nearly 19,000 deaths from skin cancer and millions of injuries. Professional footballers, who endure some of the most physically demanding work, are particularly at risk and urgently need protection.

The danger starts with excess heat. Rising temperatures and humidity create hazardous conditions. This summer, European footballers played in hotter environments than a decade ago.

Athletes face unique risks because they generate metabolic heat while exerting themselves. The harder and longer they play, the greater their heat exposure, increasing risks from fatigue and dizziness to heat stroke and long-term illnesses like cardiovascular disease and cancer.

The risks extend beyond physical risks. Footballers face intense psychological pressure, often playing through pain and hiding symptoms. Increasing matches, reduced rest, and overlapping seasons worsen fatigue, injury, anxiety, and depression.

The ILO has promoted worker protections for over a century, emphasizing that all workers—including athletes—have the right to safe and healthy workplaces. Health includes physical and mental well-being, directly tied to workplace safety. Employers must ensure workplaces pose no health risks. But laws alone are not enough; organizational culture and meaningful dialogue with workers are essential. Athletes and their representatives need information, training, and a voice in safety decisions.

This collective governance principle was key to the historic Global Labour Agreement negotiated by FIFPRO and the World Leagues Forum with ILO support. It protects footballers' rights through shared decision-making, ushering in a new era of social dialogue and empowerment.

> **As temperatures rise and workloads increase, these protections are more vital than ever. Managing extreme heat and intense schedules requires cooperation, respect, and proactive governance. The ILO stands ready to support football in building a safer, healthier future for players worldwide.**

FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS: MANAGING EXTREME TEMPERATURES

Specific risks emerge from the region, timing and format of the competition. While national league competitions would have traditionally more room to adapt kick-off times or deal with match postponements a compressed tournament format will leave less room for such safety measures to be taken without significant knock-on effects on the entire tournament schedule.

HEAT MITIGATION – POLICY AND PROTOCOL DEVELOPMENT

To further player and participant safety, every competition must include the development of a heat mitigation policy that is based on various mitigation steps:

01 **Elimination** – Postponing matches in extreme heat.

02 **Match Scheduling** – Adjusting match timing or locations to reduce heat exposure.

03 **Engineering Controls** – Providing shade, cooling stations, hydration facilities, and other practical steps to minimise the impact of extreme heat

04 **Administrative Controls** – Implementing education programs, monitoring heat conditions, and establishing enforceable safety protocols between the competition organiser and the player union.

05 **Personal Protective Measures** – Ensuring hydration, acclimatization, and use of cooling aids such as ice baths or cooling towels.

FIFPRO – HEAT MITIGATION STANDARDS

To better protect players' health and performance during training and match play in hot conditions, FIFPRO has been advocating for many years to apply its WBGT thresholds and related mitigation strategies, namely:

- WBGT above 26°C (or ambient temperature above 30°C) should warrant cooling breaks during matches;
- WBGT above 28°C (or ambient temperature above 36°C) should lead to the delay or postponement of matches until conditions for players and officials (and fans) are safer;
- WBGT (and/or ambient temperature) should be measured on-site before each match and training session (e.g., two hours), and consultation between key stakeholders (e.g., players, coaches, match officials, team physicians) about potential risks should occur;
- Next to additional cooling breaks, other mitigation strategies (e.g., heat acclimation/acclimatisation, cooling methods, easy availability of cool drinks all around the football field) should be planned and used for matches and training, with responsibility for their implementation resting with teams and individuals involved.

Competition organizers and player unions should together monitor the national and local weather forecasts to estimate potential hot conditions and subsequently liaise with all stakeholders to not scheduled matches at the hottest time of day (e.g., mid-day matches) where high WBGT is most likely. This would prevent to put players at risk for heat-related illnesses.

Additional mitigation measures are also available via Guidelines and Mitigation Strategies for Hot Conditions in Professional Football - FIFPRO World Players' Union.

FIFA CLUB WORLD CUP: A CASE STUDY FOR COMPETITION PLANNING, PROTOCOL DEVELOPMENT AND MATCH DAY OPERATIONS

The 2025 FIFA Club World Cup took place in the United States summer under conditions that posed significant challenges for players, particularly due to high temperatures and adverse weather. These conditions not only affected the energy players could exert during a match but also carried risks for their health.

SCENARIO PLANNING FOR HEAT RELATED RISKS

Based on most recent data, namely the June 2024 afternoon temperatures and humidity levels, the WBGT values across the 11 host cities of the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 were found to range from 20.1°C in Seattle to 29.3°C in Philadelphia PA and Washington DC.

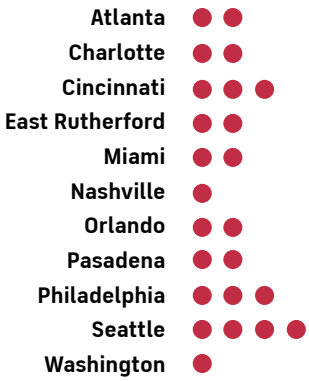
According to the FIFPRO/PFA heat guidelines, the risk of heat-related illnesses was categorized as extreme in all but four of the June 2024 WBGT values, warranting the delay or postponement of matches until conditions for players and officials (and fans) are safer.

The FIFA Club World Cup 2025 was played in the USA from June 14th to July 13th, 2025. Thirty-two clubs from AFC, CAF, Concacaf, CONMEBOL, OFC and UEFA were involved and played a total of 63 matches in 11 cities (12 stadiums involved).

For the group stage, the following kick-off times applied:

The kick-off times are of particular importance as the match schedule aligns with European broadcast audiences as well as peak heat conditions during the day.

These 24 matches were played across the following host cities:



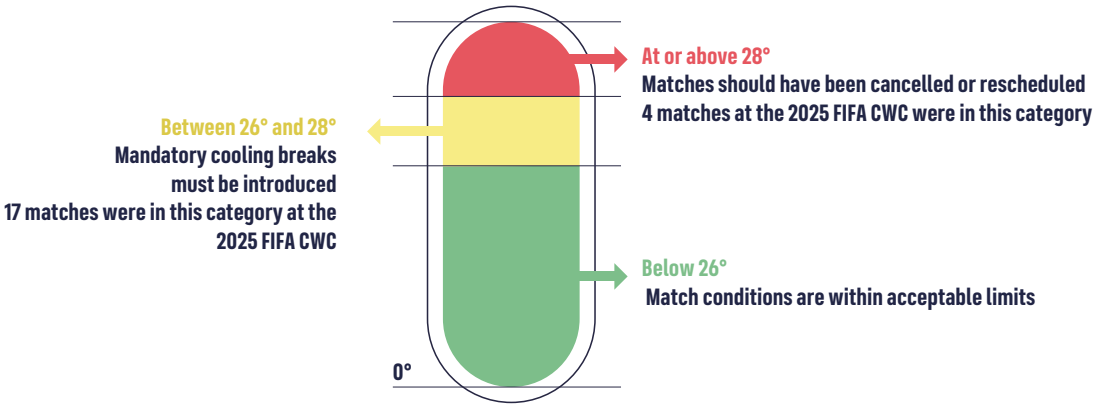
Considering the period of the year, the kick-off times and the geographical location of these host cities, as well as historic heat conditions it was anticipated that players, fans and officials would face a reasonable high risk to be exposed to extreme heat conditions.

Therefore, it was anticipated that extra measures and adapted heat guidelines and related mitigation strategies would be required to protect the players' health and performances.

FIFA CLUB WORLD CUP: MANAGING EXTREME TEMPERATURES

The recent Club World Cup highlighted numerous incidents of extreme climate conditions, with players stating that their performance declined and that they struggled with dizziness and fatigue. Both players and coaches have voiced concerns.

Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) at the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup



Source:FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

Details of matches in the "should have been cancelled or rescheduled" category

Date and kick-off time (EST)	Fixture	Venue (City)	Temperature (°C)	Humidity (%)	WBGT (°C)	Attendance
24/06/2025 – 3 PM	Benfica vs Bayern	Bank of America Stadium (Charlotte)	37	40	29.3	33,287
26/06/2025 – 3 PM	Wydad AC vs Al Ain	Audi Field, (Washington, D.C.)	33	56	28.2	10,785
18/06/2025 – 3 PM	Real Madrid vs Al Hilal	Hard Rock Stadium (Miami)	32	63	28.1	62,415
24/06/2025 – 3 PM	Auckland vs Boca Juniors	Geodis Park, (Nashville)	34	49	28.0	16,899

Source:FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

The four Club World Cup matches shown in the table all reached a WBGT above 28°C. Under FIFPRO's guidelines, such matches should ideally have been cancelled or rescheduled to avoid jeopardising player safety.

The situation was partly caused by the scheduling, with all four matches being played at 3 pm, naturally one of the hottest points in the day, especially in the US summer. In addition, a further 17 matches in the competition (27%) reached WBGT levels that, according to FIFPRO guidelines, were close to the cancellation/rescheduling threshold (26°C–28°C) and required mandatory drinks breaks. This highlights the scale of the challenge faced by both players and all those involved on matchday.

As a consequence, the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 was subject to several ad-hoc changes in the match protocols and heat related policies as the tournament organiser and the participating teams and players tried to adapt to the circumstances.

Other major weather concerns during the Club World Cup

Although heat was a major factor impacting the Club World Cup, other climate events also occurred during the competition, with six matches experiencing delays of up to two hours due to thunderstorms and heavy rainfall, further complicating matchday logistics. These additional extreme climate events, along with the well-documented impact of heat conditions, suggest that competition location and timing should be given greater consideration by competition organisers. Simply adding extra fixtures to 'seemingly' open slots within the match calendar not only affects player well-being and the quality of on-pitch performance, but also creates logistical challenges, as certain climates may prevent football from being played at specific locations at particular times.


Emirates

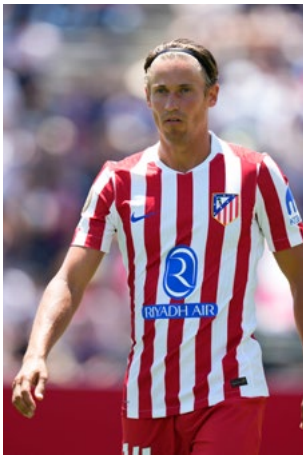
MATCH CONDITIONS UNDER INTENSE HEAT AT THE 2025 FIFA CLUB WORLD CUP

The 2025 FIFA Club World Cup took place at the height of summer in the United States, with temperatures frequently nearing or exceeding the limits of safe playing conditions. Such conditions drew widespread criticism of the event's scheduling and venue selection, with many questioning whether adequate measures had been taken to protect player welfare. Commentary on the heat and dangerous match conditions was a recurring theme, with players and managers voicing direct complaints and citing the heat as a significant factor in their preparation and performances. The following examples illustrate just a fraction of the concerns expressed throughout the tournament.

"As a spectator, you would like to see intensive, aggressive, up and down football, so when it's too hot, then it's difficult to play this kind of football."

NIKO KOVAC
(BORUSSIA DORTMUND, MANAGER)

"It's terribly hot. My toes were sore; my nails were hurting. I couldn't stop or start. In the end, it's incredible."



MARCOS LLORENTE
(ATLÉTICO DE MADRID)

"The heat is incredible. The other day I got a little dizzy from playing and I had to go on the ground. The truth is, playing at that time is very dangerous. It's very dangerous."

ENZO FERNÁNDEZ
(CHELSEA FC)

"The match was clearly influenced by the temperature," he said. "The timing is great for European fans, but the teams are suffering."

LUIS ENRIQUE
(PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN FC, MANAGER)


FIFA CLUB WORLD CU
EXIT
Borussia Dortmund
@BVB · Follow
Our subs watched the first half from inside the locker room to avoid the blazing sun at TQL Stadium – never seen that before, but in this heat, it absolutely makes sense. #FIFACWC

FUTURE COMPETITION PLANNING TO ADDRESS EXTREME HEAT

As global average temperatures rise, there will be knock on effects which cause more extreme variations in weather and climate more broadly. This will have a growing impact on competitions, national or international, and will require competition organisers and player unions to strengthen heat and extreme weather related protocols.

2026 FIFA World Cup – More of the Same?

The climate of the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup serves as a useful barometer for what the 2026 FIFA World Cup may look like, particularly in the United States, where a significant number of matches will be played in the same locations as the earlier Club World Cup and at a similar time of year (11 June to 19 July 2026) – the height of summer across North America, when heat and humidity are at their most punishing.

LOCATION OF THE HOST CITIES OF THE 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP

Three host cities of the 2026 World Cup had matches at the 2025 Club World Cup above the 26° WBGT threshold at which cooling breaks (or even postponement) is recommended by FIFPRO

City also hosted 2025 FIFA Club World Cup games where WBGT was at or above the 26 degree threshold	City also hosted 2025 FIFA Club World Cup games but without WBGT exceeding 26	City did not host 2025 FIFA Club World Cup games
1 Miami	4 Atlanta	7 Boston
2 New York/New Jersey	5 Los Angeles	8 Dallas
3 Philadelphia	6 Seattle	9 Guadalajara
		10 Houston
		11 Kansas City
		12 Mexico City
		13 Monterrey
		14 San Francisco
		15 Toronto
		16 Vancouver

Source:FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

Six of the 16 host cities for the tournament face conditions classified as 'extreme risk' for heat-related illness, heightening safety concerns not only for players, but also for fans exposed to prolonged sun and heat in open stadiums.

Unlike the Club World Cup, however, the 2026 edition will also extend into Canada and Mexico (each hosting 13 of the competition's 104 matches, with the United States hosting 78), adding further layers of complexity. Canadian venues may offer some respite with cooler and more temperate conditions, though sudden heatwaves remain a possibility.
By contrast, Mexico is likely to experience searing summer temperatures, compounding the strain on players and spectators. Within the United States itself, climates vary widely — from humid southern cities to drier, inland regions — creating an unpredictable set of conditions for teams to navigate.

The expanded 48-team format only amplifies these issues. With matches spread across a vast geographical area, squads and supporters alike face long journeys, frequent time-zone changes, and abrupt shifts in climate, all of which risk exacerbating fatigue and diminishing performance levels at a time when the football calendar is already under immense pressure. In this context, the existing schedule and venue selections may need to be reassessed to better safeguard player health, protect fan well-being, and support optimal performance.

Looking Beyond 2026

Beyond the 2026 FIFA World Cup, additional challenges related to climate and match conditions lie ahead.

NATIONAL COMPETITIONS

At the start of the 2024/2025 season Romanian player union AFAN coordinated with the Romanian Professional Football League (LPF) to alter SuperLiga kick-off times to protect players from extreme heat.

Temperatures in the Romanian capital Bucharest surpassed 40°C on the campaign-opening weekend, bringing into question the welfare of players having to compete in extreme heat during the late afternoon and early evening.

AFAN President Emilian Hulubei said: *"Taking into consideration the extremely high temperatures, the numerous warnings issued by the authorities on the risks that may occur, and the fact that code orange and even code red heatwave warnings were issued in certain regions, we requested LFP take the necessary measures to schedule games as late as possible, in order to ensure safe playing conditions that can allow players and all those involved to carry out activities without exposing themselves to additional risks."*

LFP acted swiftly to the union's request, quickly reaching an agreement with broadcasters to move kick-off times to 19:00 and 22:00 for the second round of SuperLiga games. Four cooling breaks per match were also implemented.

This is just one example how extreme weather conditions will also impact national club competitions in the future.


VEIRA
26

07

YOUNG PLAYERS: RISKS TO CAREER LONGEVITY

As highlighted in earlier chapters, player workloads are escalating in step with an increasingly congested football calendar. Young players are particularly vulnerable, as clubs and national teams often demand too much from them too soon, prioritising short-term results over long-term development. Without clear safeguards, these rising demands risk undermining both their health and their career longevity.

"To ignore the consequence of the number of games and amount of travelling will end in injuries for any player."

MARCELO BIELSA
(URUGUAY NATIONAL TEAM, MANAGER)

07 / YOUNG PLAYERS: RISKS TO CAREER LONGEVITY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a range of historical workload comparisons, highlighting a worrying trend: modern players experience significantly heavier workloads than their predecessors did at the same age. Specifically, the analysis includes historical workload comparisons of current and former players from Spain, Morocco and Brazil.

MEDICAL CONSENSUS STATEMENTS REGARDING YOUNG PLAYER SAFEGUARDS

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

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

Click here to explore all 12 medical consensus statements.

Source: FIFPRO's 'Medical Position Statement on Minimum Player Workload Safeguards in Men's Professional Football' study (June 2025)

EXPERT'S VIEW

PROTECTING YOUNG PLAYERS REMAINS FUNDAMENTAL FOR SUSTAINED SUCCESS

DR. DARREN BURGESS
Chair, FIFPRO High-Performance Advisory Network
Director of Performance, Juventus FC

The modern game's rising intensity is challenging enough for established professionals, but for young players aged 16 to 20, the risks are even greater. At a stage when their bodies and minds are still developing, the demands of congested schedules and high-intensity training can have lasting consequences for both performance and career longevity.

Physically, exposing teenagers to repeated match and training loads designed for fully mature players increases the risk of overuse injuries. Growth plates, tendons, and ligaments remain vulnerable during these years, and excessive high-speed running or short recovery windows can lead to long-term structural damage. What might begin as a minor issue — a recurring hamstring strain, a stress fracture — can quickly become a pattern that follows a player throughout their career.

The psychological toll should also not be underestimated. Young players already face the pressure of proving themselves in elite environments, often under the spotlight of media and public expectation. When combined with the fatigue of constant competition, the risk of burnout, anxiety, and diminished confidence grows. Instead of building resilience, overloading can erode their capacity to cope with the game's demands.

Perhaps the greatest cost of all is lost potential. A player rushed into the spotlight too soon, without adequate protection and progressive development, may see their career shortened before it ever truly begins.

> **What football gains in the short term through overuse, it loses in the long run in terms of sustained excellence and availability.**

Safeguarding young players requires restraint. Age-appropriate training loads, clear limits on match exposure, and protected rest periods are essential. If the sport is serious about nurturing the next generation, it must prioritise development over exploitation. Only then will today's young talents have the chance to become tomorrow's enduring stars.

PLAYER CASE STUDY: LAMINE YAMAL
METHODOLOGY

In last year's report, we analyzed the match workload of Real Madrid's young star, Jude Bellingham, revealing that by age 21, the English midfielder had already played significantly more games than other notable English players had at the same stage of their careers. Fast forward a year, and another exceptional talent has emerged on the global stage in Lamine Yamal. At just 18 years old, the Spanish prodigy has made waves with his rapid ascent, drawing comparisons to some of the most prominent players the country has seen.

This section offers an in-depth look at Yamal's career match load to date, evaluating whether his cumulative appearances are comparable to those of renowned Spanish players at a similar age. We then extend the comparison by assessing Yamal's workload following his recognition as the 2024 Golden Boy winner, against other recipients of the individual award.

Making his professional debut for Barcelona at just 15 years of age, he instantly captured the attention of the football world as the youngest debutant in the club's history. Having celebrated his 18th birthday in July 2025, Yamal has already amassed a remarkable number of appearances for both Barcelona and the Spanish national team. He quickly established himself as a key player, contributing decisively in domestic and international competitions and breaking several records along the way. Yamal's talent and consistent performances underline his status as one of football's brightest young stars, and his trajectory promises even greater achievements in the years ahead.

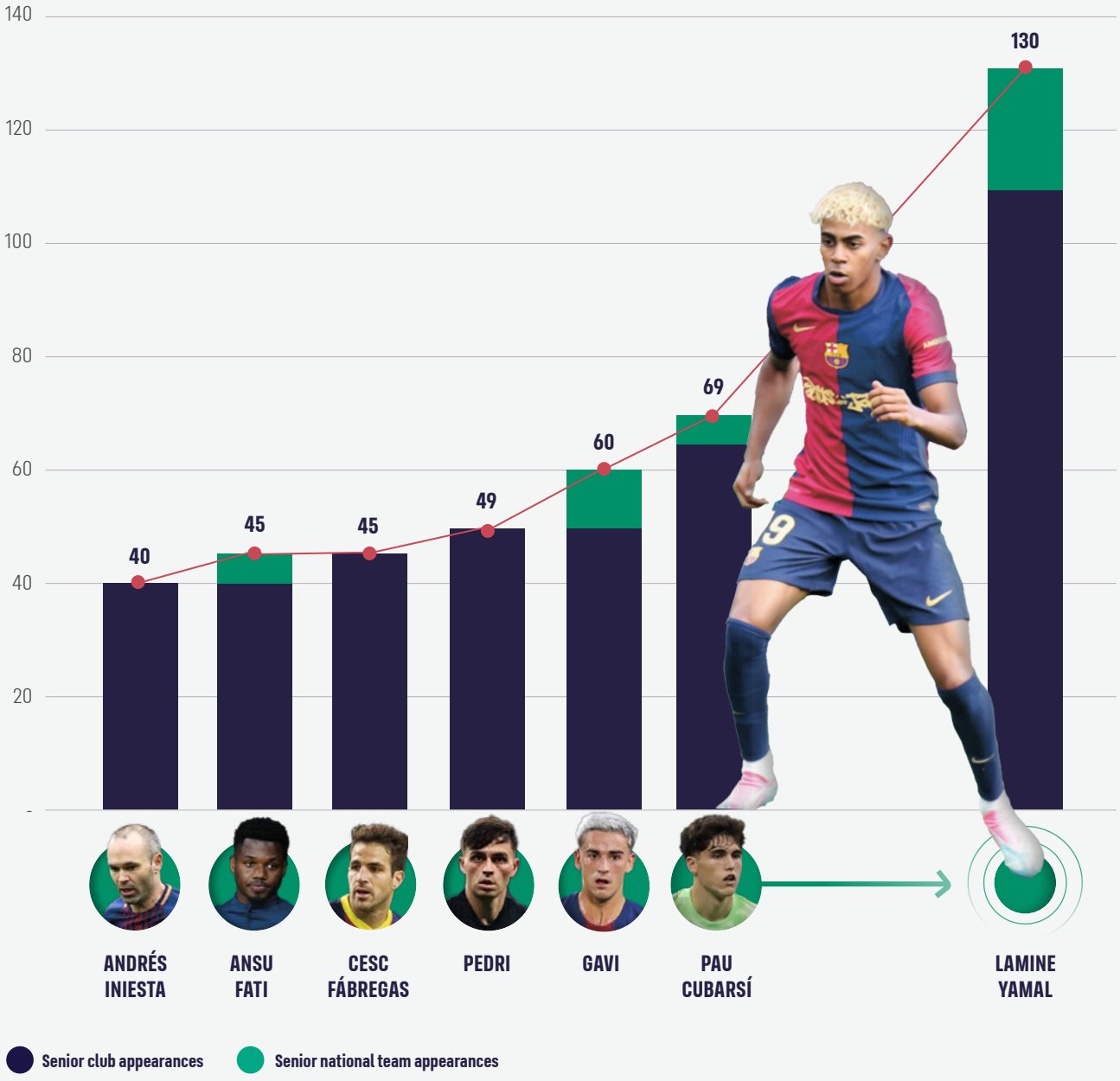
His quick development, however, has also sparked concerns about the physical and mental demands being placed on such a young player. The intense workload consisting of high-level club commitments, international tournaments, and continuous media attention poses potential risks to his long-term development and well-being. Ensuring a balanced progression will be crucial to protecting both his health and his immense potential.

"It's a shame. He went to the national team in pain, played and was given painkillers to play... He played 79 minutes and 73, that's not taking care of the players. Spain has the best players in every position. It would be worth taking care of the young players. I'm sad about the situation."

HANSI FLICK
(FC BARCELONA MANAGER)
speaking about Lamine Yamal in September 2025

MATCH LOAD BEFORE TURNING 18
COMPARISON WITH CURRENT AND PAST SPAIN & FC BARCELONA PLAYERS

Number of appearances made by the age of 18



Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

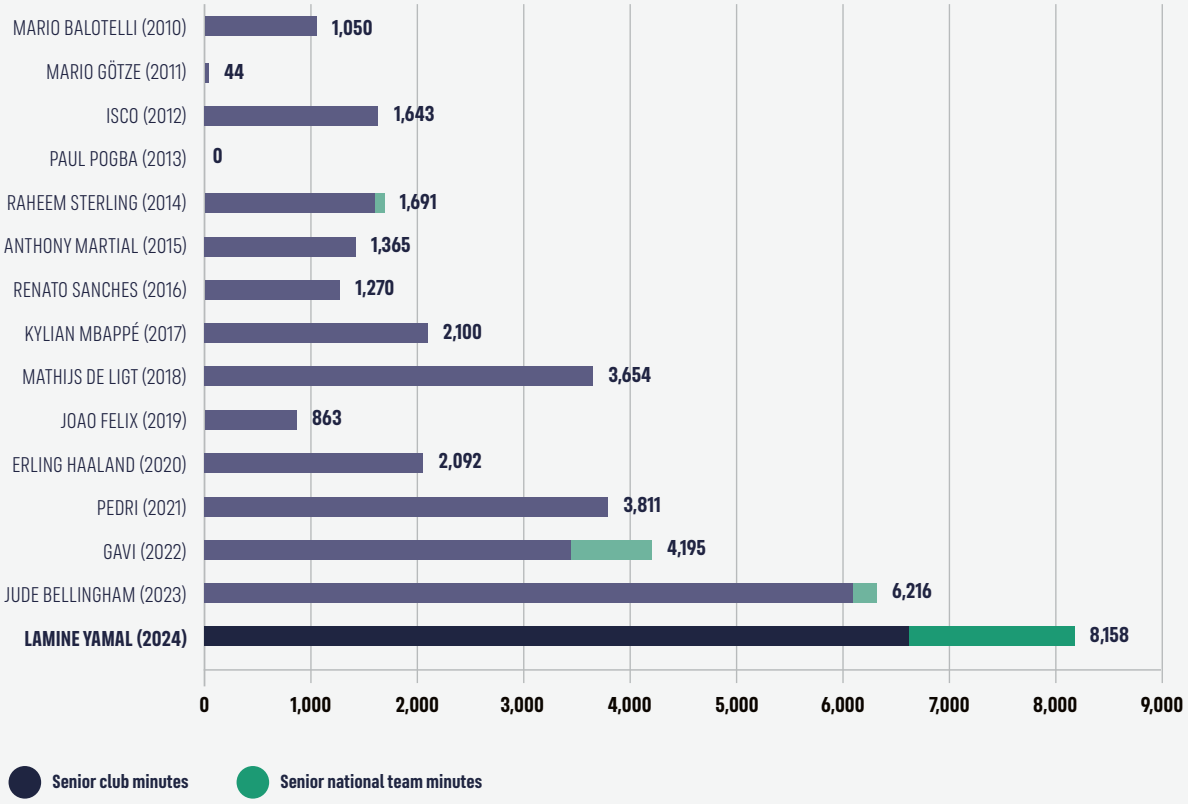
By the age of 18, Lamine Yamal has accumulated a significantly higher number of appearances for both his club and the national team than several distinguished Spanish midfielders and forwards used as benchmarks. His 130 appearances equal the combined total of Iniesta, Fábregas and Ansu Fati. It is also relevant to highlight that the players ranked second, third, and fourth in this context - Cubarsí, Gavi, and Pedri - are contemporaries of Yamal. These players similarly rose to fame in recent years, which highlights a broader shift in football, where young players are increasingly proving instrumental for their teams at an earlier age.

MATCH LOAD BEFORE TURNING 18
COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS GOLDEN BOY WINNERS

Lamine Yamal was named the 2024 Golden Boy winner, a prestigious award presented annually to the most outstanding Under-21 footballer in Europe. Selected by an international panel of sports journalists, this honour is widely regarded as the benchmark for identifying the brightest young talent in the sport. Previous recipients of the Golden Boy award have included well-known figures such as Lionel Messi, Cesc Fàbregas, Kylian Mbappé, and Jude Bellingham.

When assessing the career statistics and developmental trajectories of Yamal's predecessors, his achievements stand out. **Among the last 15 Golden Boy winners, Yamal has accumulated significantly more senior minutes before turning 18 than any other player in this elite group**, underscoring the quick pace of his integration into senior football and his exceptional durability (low number of injuries). In fact, his total minutes played prior to his 18th birthday exceed that of the next highest player, Bellingham, by an impressive 31%.

Minutes played by Golden Boy winners before the age of 18



Note: numbers in brackets represent the year in which the player won the European Golden Boy Award.
Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

Remarkably, the players occupying the top four spots in terms of pre-18 workload are also the four most recent Golden Boy winners, again illustrating the distinct trend towards increasingly younger players taking on key first-team responsibilities.

Many of the past Golden Boy award recipients serve as a **reminder of how difficult it is for highly touted prospects to sustain elite-level success over time.** Several winners who garnered immense attention early in their careers, such as Anthony Martial, Renato Sanches, and Isco, have been repeatedly sidelined by persistent injuries, hampering their ability to fulfil the expectations set for them at a young age. In terms of matches missed due to injury, Paul Pogba and Renato Sanches top the list in our sample with both players missing more than 150 games throughout their careers. Close behind are Mario Götze and Mario Balotelli, who have also seen their development and consistency disrupted by frequent fitness setbacks. Yamal will undoubtedly be hopeful of avoiding injury and having a long and successful career for many years to come.


19
HEAT.RDY

HISTORICAL MATCH LOAD COMPARISONS

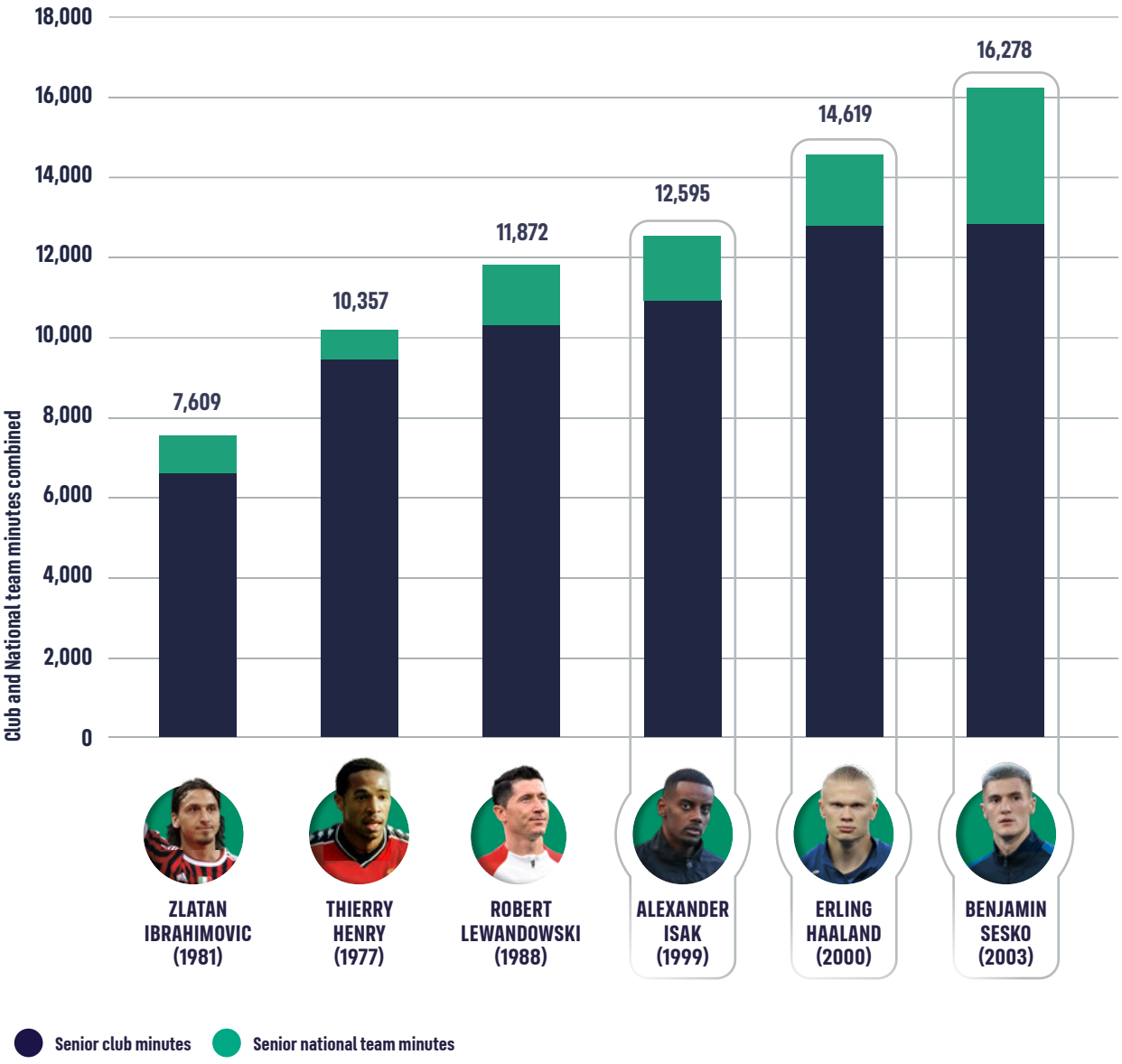
YOUNG ELITE PLAYERS OF TODAY EXPERIENCE HIGHER EARLY-CAREER PLAYING TIME THAN HISTORICAL PEERS

Comparison of players from different eras is an often-debated topic. Who was the better player? Could the great players of the past thrive in the modern game? While the comparative assessment of quality across eras is difficult, comparing them in terms of playing time is readily possible.

In this section, a selection of active players is compared to their older compatriots to put the modern workload into perspective. How many minutes or appearances have they had by the same age?

The nations that have been selected for this assessment are Morocco and Brazil. In similar fashion, a comparison of European strikers of past and present has also been prepared to showcase the evolution of match load requirements. Only competitive club matches and senior national team games have been considered.

Top European strikers before turning 22 – senior club and national team minutes

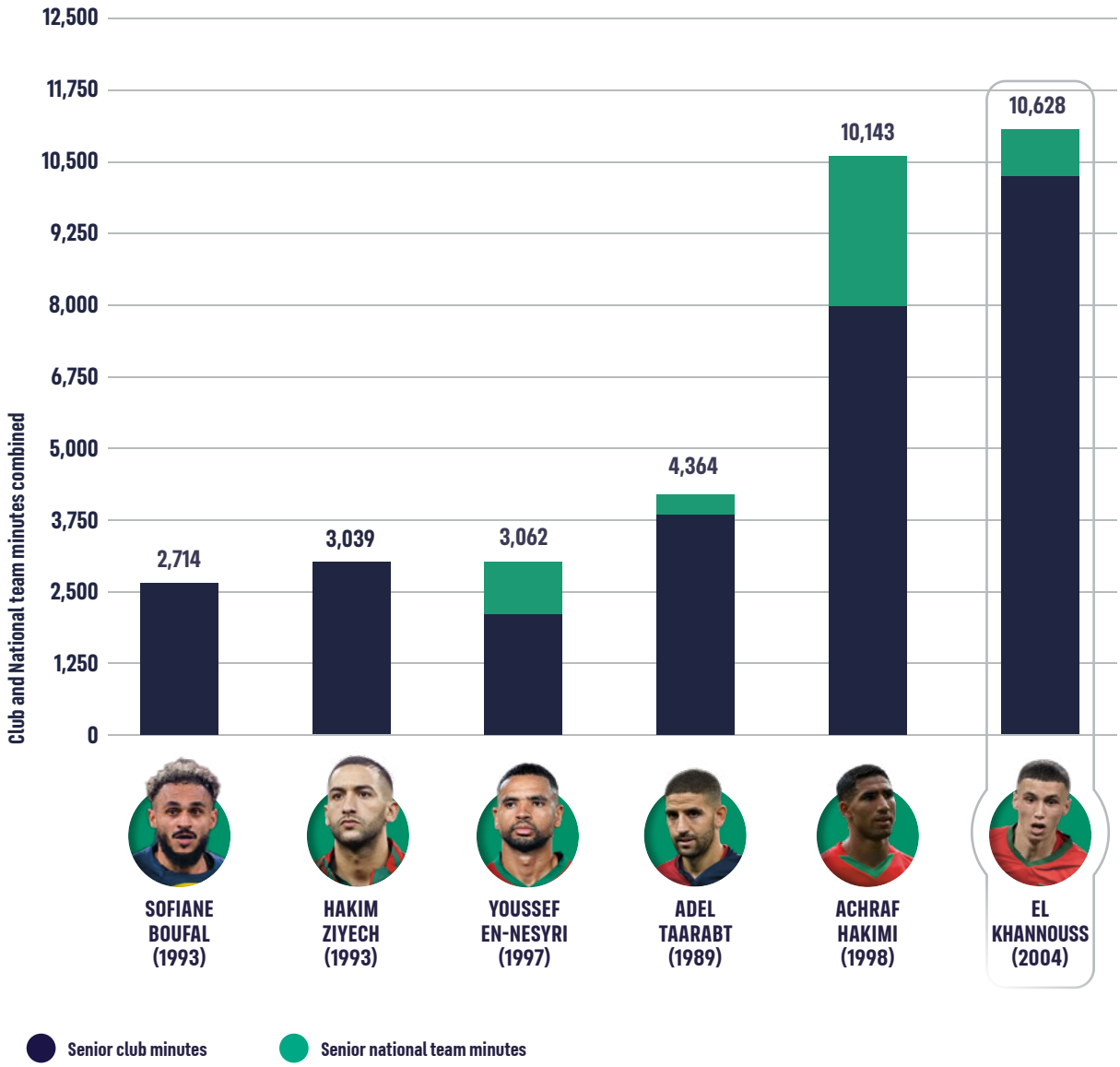


Note: numbers in brackets indicate the birth year of the players.

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

Historically, top European strikers have made early breakthroughs at both club and national team levels, leveraging their exceptional goalscoring abilities to influence high-stakes matches. While this trend has persisted over time, recent data indicates a notable shift, with younger players in this position now accumulating significantly more minutes than previous generations. For example, prolific forwards such as Robert Lewandowski, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, and Thierry Henry recorded substantially fewer match minutes by the age of 22 compared to emerging talents born around the year 2000. Players such as Alexander Isak, Erling Haaland, and Benjamin Šeško have each surpassed 12,000 competitive minutes prior to turning 22, establishing themselves as consistent starters for both club and national teams. This reflects an evolving landscape where elite young strikers are taking on greater workloads earlier in their careers.

Morocco players before turning 21 – senior club and national team minutes

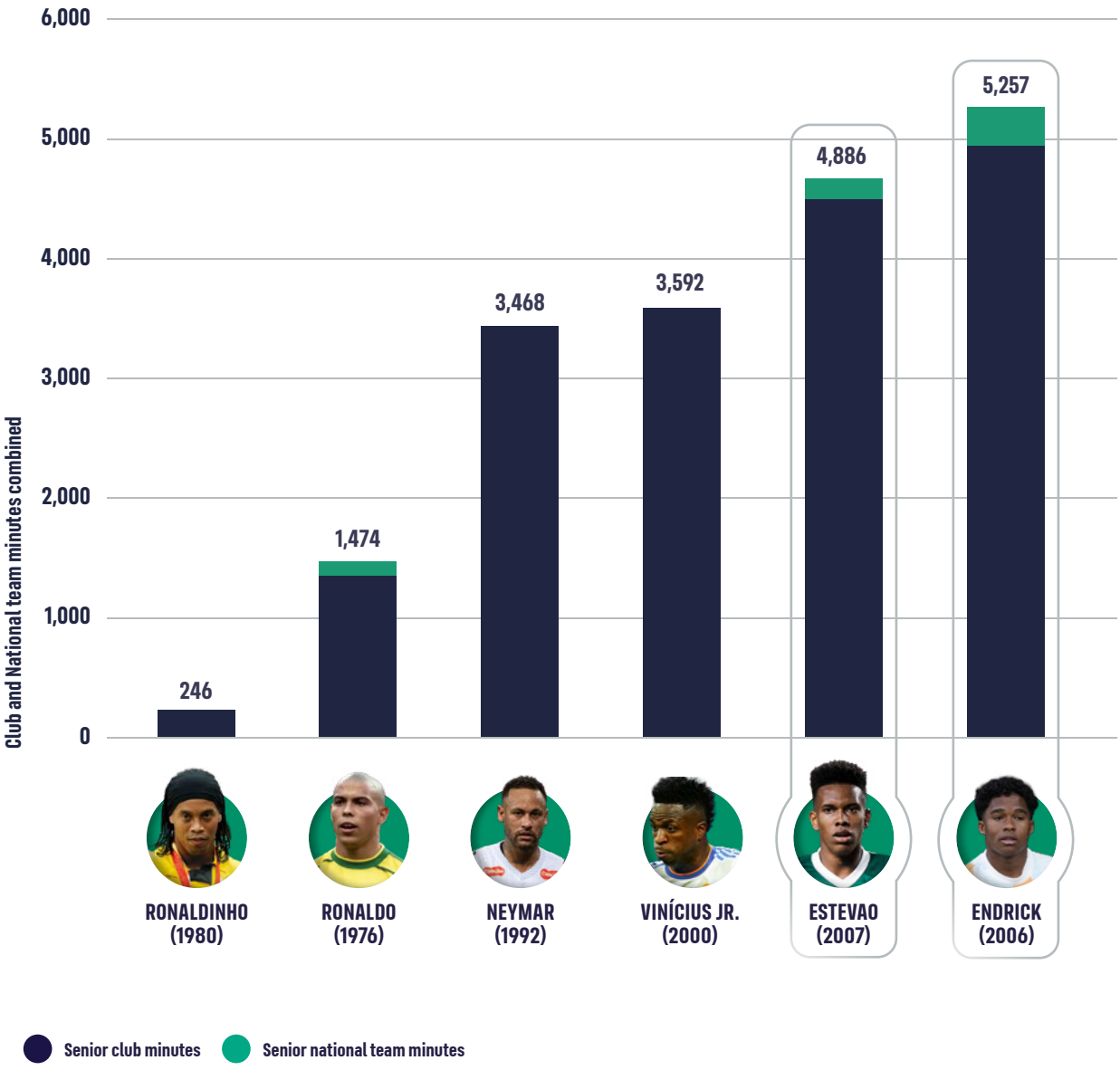


Note: numbers in brackets indicate the birth year of the players.

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

Before 21, Bilal El Khannouss has already accumulated significantly more minutes across his club and national team commitments than many of his Moroccan compatriots of the past. From an appearance perspective, El Khannouss has made nearly 40 more appearances than the next player on this list, the now 26-year-old Achraf Hakimi, who himself was recognized for handling a heavy match workload at a young age. This highlights Morocco's potential in developing a future generational star with El Khannouss. However, it also serves as a cautionary note: accumulating so many minutes so early could increase the risk of injuries as his career progresses.

Brazil players before turning 18 – senior club and national team minutes



Note: numbers in brackets indicate the birth year of the players.

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

Brazilian players frequently break into professional football at a young age. Neymar, for instance, made his debut at 17 years old, while Ronaldo started even younger at 16. In recent years, Endrick and Estevão have risen to prominence, with both of them having made their senior debuts at 16 years of age. Remarkably, before turning 18, both Real Madrid star Endrick and new Chelsea signing Estevão have already accumulated more than 4,000 senior minutes, surpassing the early career totals of both Vinícius Júnior and Neymar, who also played significant minutes as teenagers. Brazil continues to produce exceptional young talents, but an increasing amount of heavy workload placed on these prodigies at such an early age could affect their long-term physical health.

08

GLOBAL WORKLOAD: REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The demands placed on players are far from uniform, varying dramatically across regions and competitions. The following chapter provides an in-depth look at workload disparities globally, unpacking regional trends and raising questions about the balance and fairness of the global football calendar. The impacts of competition format changes and fixture congestion are also investigated.

"When Argentina plays in Venezuela, there is not only the workload of the player from the previous game in Europe to consider, but also the travel. Then the second game, you have to go back to Buenos Aires which is another seven hours of travel. The reality is that it is unthinkable that this can improve."

LIONEL SCALONI
(ARGENTINA NATIONAL TEAM COACH)


CABJ
CARRIGA
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5

AFRICA

Regional Workload Analysis

Player workload challenges in Africa are shaped by a unique combination of competitive, environmental, and logistical pressures. The continent's vast geography, limited flight connectivity, and expanding competition formats create intense demands on players, with some facing schedules at the very limits of expert recommendations. At the same time, there are huge disparities between players involved in international games and those that only play domestic competitions, while extreme weather conditions add further strain to an already congested calendar.

This year's Africa Cup of Nations is a particularly significant factor, placing mid-season pressure on Europe-based players while disrupting domestic rhythms for those who do not participate. Looking ahead, new and expanded competitions risk compounding these challenges unless meaningful dialogue with players and their unions leads to safeguards.

In this section, we highlight findings from the 2024 African Player Workload Report and present a detailed case study of Shamrock Rovers and Cape Verde defender Roberto Lopes, whose recent schedule illustrates how overlapping calendars, and relentless travel can leave players with little to no recovery time.

KEY PWM METRICS (2024/25)

High travel load as a result of international commitments

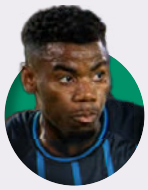
TEBOHO MOKOENA

110,000 km
International (cross-border) travel distance

142 hours
Time spent with international travel

Mokoena shouldered the heaviest international travel load of any domestic-based African player in the PWM platform.

Two games a week for most of the season



RAPHAEL ONYEDIKA

13
Longest back-to-back match streak

65 %
Share of back-to-back matches out of total

Playing in the Belgian league and with various national team commitments, the two-thirds of the midfielder's match load was in the back-to-back category without adequate recovery time.

Excessive match load throughout the season

PAPE MATAR SARR

71
Matchday squad inclusions

67
Match appearances

The player well exceeded the recommended maximum limit of 55 appearances for the season while contributing to his teams' success in several competitions.

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

2024 AFRICAN PLAYER WORKLOAD REPORT – A SUMMARY

The 2024 African Player Workload Report analyzed the match schedules of a sample of 60 Africa-based players and examined additional workload factors such as travel demands, fixture congestion, and extreme weather conditions. It also evaluated the impact of the CAF Africa Cup of Nations on national team players based overseas and highlighted emerging workload challenges associated with future competition reforms.

Disparities in football development, along with the expansion and unpredictable scheduling of competitions, create specific risks for players. They often bear the brunt of increased workload without adequate support, facing challenging conditions.

SEVEN TRENDS AT A GLANCE:
PLAYER-CENTRIC WORKLOAD & COMPETITION CHALLENGES IN AFRICA

1. Africa-based players with international commitments face excessive workload in challenging conditions

Africa-based players with international commitments face workloads up to twice as heavy as those focused solely on domestic football. Current competition formats push players to their limits, with some playing up to 60 matches per season. In addition to workload levels that reach the upper threshold recommended by performance experts, African players also experience adverse working conditions that further impact their performance, health, and safety.

2. Extreme weather conditions are significant in determining player safeguards

Extreme weather events in many regions, such as droughts, floods, and heat, place additional strain on players. Combined with demanding schedules and limited rest, these factors heighten the risk of injury and mental fatigue. To safeguard player health, it's essential to consider these unique environmental challenges as part of their overall workload and playing conditions.

3. New and expanded competitions increase risks for players

The introduction of new tournaments and future format changes to existing African competitions will exacerbate risks for players. It will be critical to monitor these changes to assess necessary safeguards for at-risk African players. Competition organisers must also engage in meaningful dialogue with players and their unions to identify common solutions.

4. Inter-African travel places heavy burden on players and clubs

African players' physical demands are significantly amplified by extensive travel conditions. Travel within Africa often involves long distances, limited direct flight routes, and multiple layovers, leading to fatigue and reduced recovery time.

5. Underload remains a key issue for domestic-only players

Meanwhile, domestic-only players face lighter schedules, often lacking sufficient competitive opportunities. This growing divide creates an imbalance, with international players under increasing pressure, while domestic-only players struggle with underload. This disparity further complicates the workload environment, highlighting the need for more nuanced workload assessments for African players.

6. AFCON I: Mid-season scheduling strains Europe-based African players

The mid-season scheduling of AFCON creates significant challenges for African players employed by European clubs, as they must leave club commitments to fulfill national team duties. This adds to an already demanding calendar, causing friction with clubs and placing added physical and mental strain on players.

7. AFCON II: Non-participating Africa-based players face an uneven workload

For Africa-based players that are not participating in AFCON, the tournament can also create disruptions in the domestic season, leading to a lack of competitive matches and further contributing to an uneven distribution of workload among players.

PLAYER CASE STUDY – ROBERTO LOPES

AN EXAMPLE OF EXTREME CALENDAR CONGESTION

A striking example of the growing challenges around fixture congestion can be seen in the recent calendar of Roberto Lopes, who represents Cape Verde internationally and Shamrock Rovers at club level.

2024 Schedule - Non-stop play all-year round

Lopes began 2024 with the Cape Verde national team, featuring in a preparatory friendly on 10 January 2024, just four days before the start of the Africa Cup of Nations. He went on to play a central role in Cape Verde's remarkable run to the quarterfinals, starting in four of their five matches. Notably, this tournament fell during what should have been his off-season period, as the League of Ireland operates on a calendar-year schedule. Only a short time after AFCON, Lopes was back on the pitch for Shamrock Rovers in their third league game of the season. While much of Europe entered its summer break, Lopes faced the busiest stretch of his calendar. Between June and August 2024, he played across five different competitions: FIFA World Cup qualifiers with Cape Verde, domestic league and cup fixtures with Shamrock Rovers, and UEFA Champions League and Europa League qualifiers.

Shamrock Rovers ultimately advanced to the league phase of the UEFA Conference League under its new format, playing an additional six matches that meant the extension of their season. After the last domestic league game on 1 November, Shamrock Rovers immediately continued with three more league phase fixtures that same month.

2025 Schedule - More of the same?

This relentless pattern carried into 2025. Shamrock Rovers remarkably reached the Conference League knockout rounds, where they were eliminated in a 120-minute, penalty-decided tie against Molde, just eight days before the opening match of their new domestic season. By mid-2025, with league fixtures ongoing, Lopes had already featured in fresh Conference League qualifiers, once again entering a schedule that risks reducing his off-season recovery time to near zero.

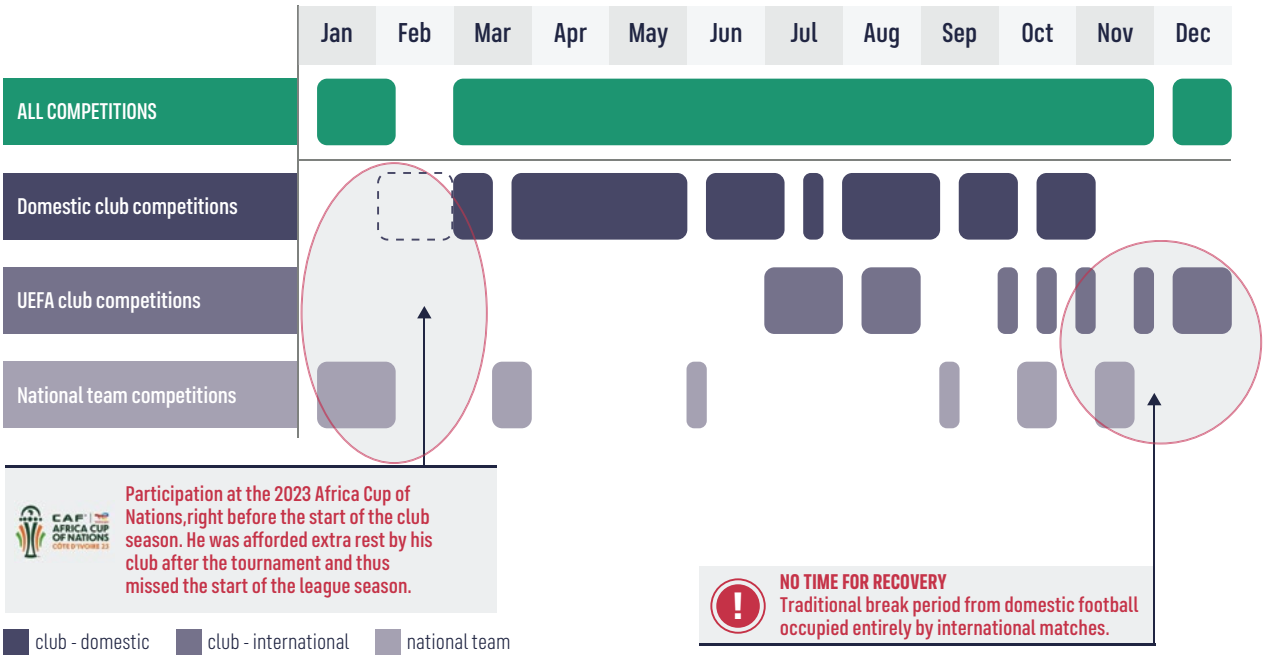
Had Cape Verde also qualified for the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, which takes place in December, Lopes' workload would have intensified even further, forcing him to compete in a major international tournament during what should be a vital recovery period for Irish-based players.

This case illustrates the severe strain placed on some players by modern football scheduling, particularly those whose careers straddle different continental calendars. **Lopes' experience highlights how many players across the industry are faced with overlapping domestic, international, and UEFA competitions that often leave players with inadequate time for rest, recovery, and physical preparation, raising concerns about both performance sustainability and long-term health.**

Roberto Lopes in action against Mohamed Salah at the AFCON.

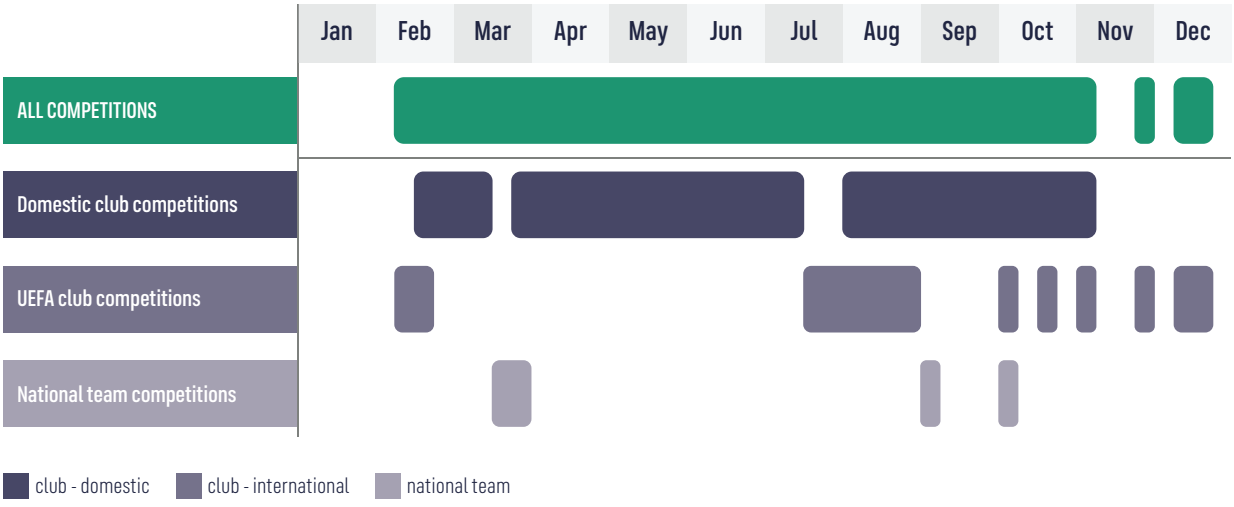
2024 MATCH SCHEDULE

Shading indicates weeks in which the player had at least one match belonging to the highlighted competition type.



Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

2025 MATCH SCHEDULE



Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

ASIA & OCEANIA

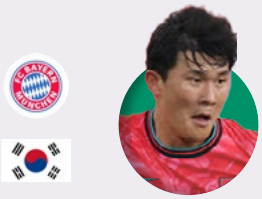
Regional Workload Analysis

One of the most urgent and persistent challenges in the Asia & Oceania region is ensuring sufficient recovery time for players facing extensive long-haul travel. The vast geography of continental Asia, combined with cross-border competition schedules, creates significant logistical and physical strain.

This issue is particularly acute for Oceania players competing in leagues on other continents; for example, around 70% of players called up to either the Australian or New Zealand senior national teams play for European or clubs in the United States, thousands of kilometres from home. When called up for international duty, these players face exhausting journeys with minimal turnaround before competing again. Without adequate recovery windows built into the competition calendar, the cumulative impact of travel fatigue can compromise both performance and player welfare. In this section, we will present a case study of an Oceania-based player's travel commitments and examine how recent reforms to the AFC Champions League have influenced travel demands and the recovery opportunities available across the region.

KEY PWM METRICS (2024/25)

Longest streak of back-to-back appearances



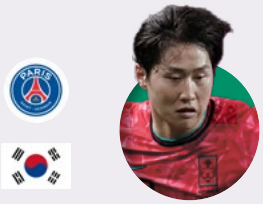
MIN-JAE KIM

20 Longest back-to-back match streak

65 % Share of back-to-back matches out of total

The centre-back had 20 matches in a row without sufficient rest in a 73-day period in late 2024, playing a competitive, high-intensity game every 3.5 days on average.

Exhausting season capped off with a Club World Cup campaign



KANG-IN LEE

33 Number of international (cross-border) trips made

105,000 km International travel distance

The Korean forward accumulated one of the highest number of trips among PWM platform players due to his involvement in PSG's international games and the Korean national team's important matches.

Cross-continental trips due to national team duty

MATHEW RYAN

23 Number of international (cross-border) trips made

169,000 km International travel distance

Although his total number of trips was not extraordinarily high, most of them were long-haul flights across continents, leading to a high overall travel distance.

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

PLAYER CASE STUDY – MARKO STAMENIC

ONE OF THE HIGHEST TRAVEL LOADS IN PWM PLATFORM

Marko Stamenic spent the 2024/25 season on loan at Olympiacos FC from Nottingham Forest FC. While playing in Greece, Olympiacos reached the Round of 16 in the UEFA Europa League, which involved extensive international travel. The new competition format added an extra away game via the Swiss system, compared to the three away group matches in previous years. Additionally, as an important member of the New Zealand national team, Stamenic accumulated one of the highest international (cross-border) travel distances among all players monitored in the PWM platform, covering close to 170,000 kilometres. Over the course of the season, he spent a total of 215 hours on these trips and crossed time zones over 100 times, requiring frequent adjustments to jet lag and varying time differences.

Around half of his international journeys involved traveling between continents. Such cross-continental travel significantly increases demands on the player, exposing them to risk factors like jet lag, disrupted recovery, and cumulative fatigue, all of which can adversely impact performance and long-term health.

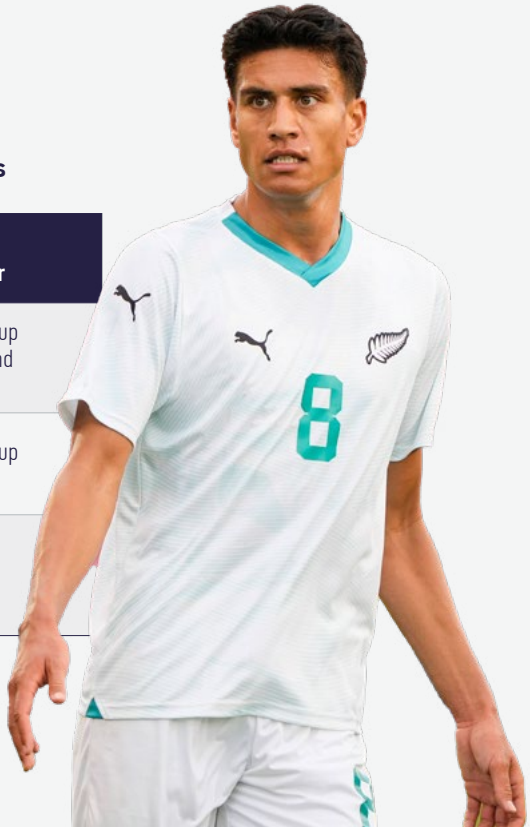
International trips made by Stamenic for club and country in 2024/25

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

Longest flights and matches played afterwards

Travel	Flight distance	Time zones crossed	Match(es) played after
From Greece to New Zealand	17,500 km	10	FIFA World Cup qualifiers and friendlies
From Greece to Vanuatu	16,000 km	9	FIFA World Cup qualifier
From Greece to Canada	8,100 km	7	Friendlies

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform



AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE REFORM

IMPACT ON TEAM TRAVEL AND PLAYER WORKLOAD

The recent AFC Champions League reform has significantly changed team travel demands. Previously, 40 teams played six group matches in a double round-robin format, with travel largely predictable and limited to scheduled group fixtures.

The 2024/25 introduction of the AFC Champions League Elite uses a 'Swiss League' format: 24 teams compete in two regional groups, playing eight matches against different opponents. Fixtures are dynamically assigned after each round, increasing the frequency and unpredictability of long-distance travel.

From the quarter-finals onward, all matches are held at a single centralized venue, reducing overall cross-continental travel but requiring concentrated relocation for multiple teams. These changes create increased travel intensity, with teams facing more matches over longer distances, often in shorter timeframes, which has implications for player fatigue and recovery.

KAWASAKI FRONTALE AND YOKOHAMA F MARINOS (JAPAN) - REDUCED TRAVEL LOAD

To evaluate the impact of the reform, the following section analyses AFC Champions League travel data for two Japanese clubs, Yokohama F. Marinos and Kawasaki. The former reached the final during the 2023/24 season under the old format, while Kawasaki did so in the 2024/25 season under the new system. Both teams played 12 matches and participated in four knockout rounds, providing a clear basis for comparison.

International travel distance for AFC Champions League away matches

2023/24 - Yokohama F Marinos		
Competition stage	Distance travelled (km)	Location country
Round of 16	9,178	
Quarter-finals	4,073	
Semi-finals	1,871	
Final	15,907	
Total distance travelled	31,029	

2024/25 - Kawasaki Frontale		
Competition stage	Distance travelled (km)	Location country
Round of 16	3,517	
Quarter-finals	19,057	
Semi-finals		
Final		
Total distance travelled	22,574	

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

Note: distances for each match refer to travelling to the away match location and then back to Japan.

As the new format could reduce travel commitments in the later stages of the tournament, this analysis focuses exclusively on the knockout rounds. The data shows that Kawasaki travelled 27% less than Yokohama did the previous year. While Yokohama made four separate round trips, visiting Thailand, China, South Korea, and the United Arab Emirates, Kawasaki only travelled to China for the away leg of the Round of 16 and to Saudi Arabia for their final three games. This resulted in a nearly 10,000 kilometres difference in total travel distance, which can have a significant impact on player performance, as less time spent traveling helps minimize fatigue and allows players to compete at a higher level.

JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM FC (MALAYSIA) - INCREASED TRAVEL LOAD

It is important to note that the new format's travel advantages apply mainly to teams that progress beyond the quarter-finals. Teams that fail to reach the latter rounds now play four away league phase matches instead of three group matches, with away destinations announced only one round at a time. This can make the new format more challenging for teams, as they must undertake more regional travel on shorter notice.

International travel distance for AFC Champions League away matches

Johor DT group stage away games (2023/24)

Opponents	Distance travelled (km)	Location country
Pathum United	2,879	
Ulsan Hyundai	9,233	
Kawasaki Frontale	10,601	
Total distance travelled	22,713	
Average distance travelled	7,571	

Johor DT league phase away games (2024/25)

Opponents	Distance travelled (km)	Location country
Shanghai Port	7,592	
Gwangju	8,892	
Shandong Taishan	8,288	
Central Coast Mariners	12,615	
Total distance travelled	37,388	
Average distance travelled	9,347	

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) research

Note: distances for each match refer to travelling to the away match location and then back to Malaysia.

For instance, Johor Darul Ta'zim FC experienced a higher travel load during the league phase in the new format compared to the previous season. Although the Malaysian club had a higher average travel distance due to being drawn against Australian side, Central Coast Mariners, this alone would not explain the 65% increase in travel load. In fact, having to play a fourth game at all made the most difference.

This example illustrates that while the new format can reduce travel challenges for some teams, for many others it may not do so, and in some cases, it might even make them worse.

EUROPE

Regional Workload Analysis

Recent reforms to men's club competitions have significantly increased match load across the European FIFPRO region. This shift has created more fixtures, more opponents, and heavier travel demands, broadening opportunities for clubs and players from diverse associations while amplifying fixture congestion and recovery pressures.

Smaller squads, in particular, face intensified physical and logistical challenges, with early evidence showing sharp rises in total matches played and reduced rotation capacity, making the balance between opportunity and overload a defining issue for European football in the coming seasons.

KEY PWM METRICS (2024/25)

High match load during a long season

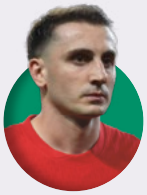
JOÃO NEVES

20 Longest back-to-back match streak

65% Share of back-to-back matches out of total

The centre-back had 20 matches in a row without sufficient rest in a 73-day period in late 2024, playing a competitive, high-intensity game every 3.5 days on average.

Congested calendar outside the European "Big Five" leagues



KEREM AKTÜRKOGLU

70 Matchday squad inclusions

69 Match appearances

Aktürkoglu was nearly ever-present for Benfica in 2024/25, including the Club World Cup, which ranked him in the top 10 for total appearances across Europe.

Sizeable increase in match load due to European competitions

SVIT SEŠLAR

40 Match appearances in 2023/24

51 Match appearances in 2024/25

Involvement in UEFA Conference League (12 games) greatly increased the player's overall match load from one season to the other (+27.5%)

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

EXPERT'S VIEW

RISING INTENSITY ACROSS THE FOOTBALL PYRAMID: AN ENGLISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE PERSPECTIVE

DAVE CAROLAN
Performance Expert

The English Football League Championship is well renowned for its competitiveness, with every club striving for promotion to the Premier League. Having spent more than a decade working with multiple clubs across the division, I've experienced the dramatic rise in match and training intensity as the physical demands on players have evolved.

Being a larger league of 24 teams than many of the elite leagues of the world (normally 20), it is a hugely demanding competition for players to compete in given the number of fixtures, quality of teams and players, and the schedule. With up to 14 midweek league games across the season across all competitions, two national cups, Bank Holiday and festive back-to-back fixtures, and with many squads containing international players too, the challenges for players in this league can be even greater than those in the elite leagues of the world. With no mid-winter break scheduled in (unlike the Premier League) the players have a huge training and match burden.

Traditionally a 'selling-league' where high-performing players would transfer to the Premier League, there is enormous pressure on players to maximise their development and performances to enable clubs to trade effectively. As a result, young and high-potential players are expected to play most of the time with little chance of rotation or management of workload. Loan players from Premier League clubs often find their first loan spells in the Championship and while it provides a stern test from a technical and tactical perspective, physically it can be a huge step-up from Under-21 or squad involvement at senior level. With pressure to play these players, they too can fall foul to overload.

The strata of clubs involved ranges from newly promoted teams from League One, recently relegated Premier League teams, seasoned 'ever-present' teams, and those facing acute challenges to remain or get out of the league at the earliest opportunity. The stresses of Championship life for all concerned can be enormous. Teams in the Championship have usually disparate resources; from squad sizes and squad quality, training facilities ranging from elite to basic, staffing levels, variety and quality, support service availability, and adding in a very high frequency of head coach turnover means that players face additional stresses to those of their elite league colleagues.

Travel is often by coach, and many hours are spent in heavy traffic travelling to weekend game and, with so many midweek fixtures, travel from midweek away fixtures can often mean returning home in the early morning from lengthy journeys. Combined with the schedule, it's a relentless, highly demanding league.

With recent changes in media scheduling, most teams can now play across every day of the week and at a wide range of kick-off times. While traditionally a Saturday-Tuesday-Saturday league, this change can mean teams are approaching then minimum rest periods between games, especially with Sunday-Wednesday-Saturday fixtures becoming more common.

> **While the Championship remains one of the world's great leagues, it should not be underestimated in terms of its increasing demands on players. While the focus may be on the game's higher-profile players, for the hundreds of players in the Championship, League One and Two, who build their careers around this reality, consideration should be given to ensuring that they also have the best chance to play and perform without long-term risks to their health and career.**

NORTH & CENTRAL AMERICA

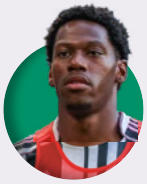
Regional Workload Analysis

A defining challenge in North and Central America is the increasingly congested and fragmented calendar. The region's domestic leagues, including Major League Soccer and Liga MX, now coexist with a growing array of international and continental tournaments, such as the Concacaf Gold Cup, Nations League, Champions Cup, and the FIFA Club World Cup. Each competition is driven by different priorities, including club revenue, fan engagement, national team success, and global commercial relevance, resulting in a fragmented calendar with shrinking windows for rest and recovery.

Scheduling conflicts are becoming more frequent, forcing clubs to postpone matches and players to navigate difficult choices between club and country. Elite players regularly face compressed seasons with minimal recovery, a challenge highlighted by withdrawals from tournaments like the Gold Cup due to accumulated fatigue. In this section, we explore how overlapping domestic, continental, and global competitions are intensifying player workload and examine the broader implications on player welfare across the region.

KEY PWM METRICS (2024/25)

Long-Distance Travel and No Time for Recovery



JONATHAN DAVID

Match #1 **16th October 2024**
Canada – Panama, 2-1
in Canada

Match #2 **18th October 2024**
AS Monaco – Lille, 0-0
in France

62.2 hours
Time between games

6,624 km
Distance between venues

In late 2024, the player had a club match only 62 hours after playing a national team match on another continent. Instances like this raise questions about recovery time.

High travel load due to club and country commitments

FRANCISCO CALVO

18
Number of international (cross-border) trips made

129,000 km
International travel distance

Calvo had several trips between Europe and Central America due to his national team duty, racking up well over 100,000 kilometers in international travel. His case is illustrative of many players'.

Busy schedule in the Central American region

ÓSCAR CASTELLANOS

61
Match appearances

46
Back-to-back match appearances

The Guatemalan player had the highest number of back-to-back games in the PWM platform among all players from the region. He also exceeded the maximum limit of 55 total appearances.

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform


CANADA
10

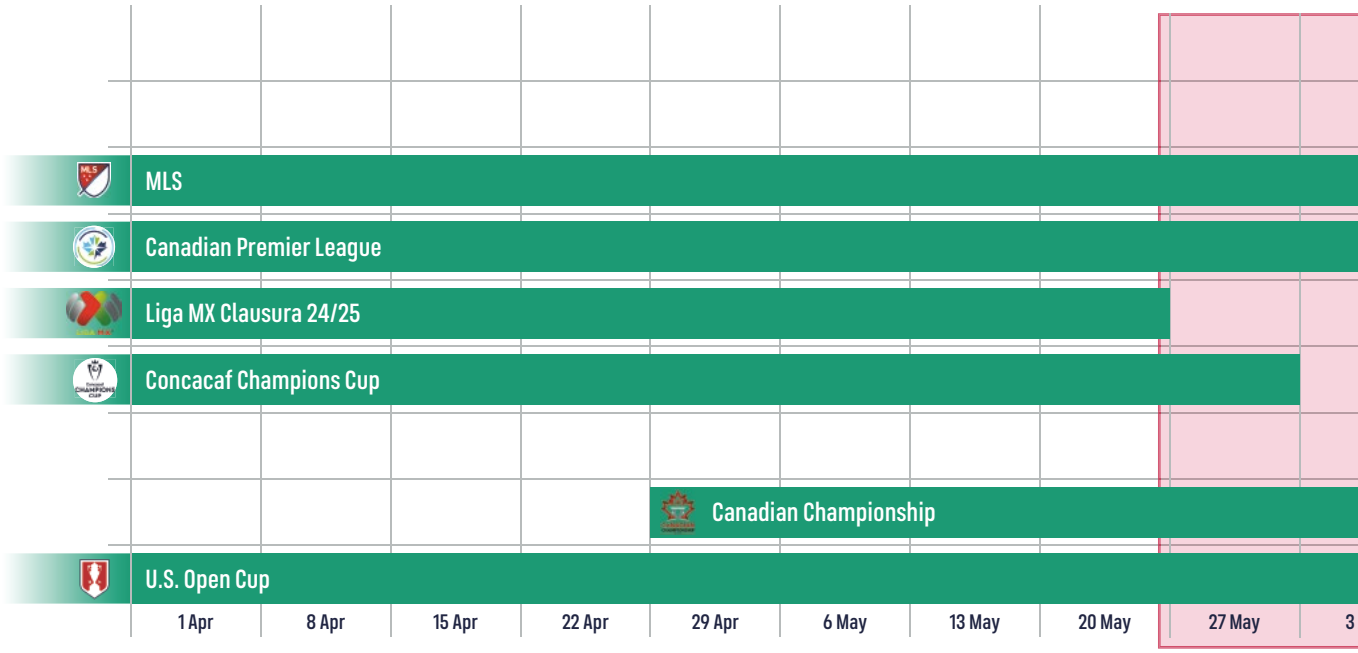
CALENDAR CONGESTION AND OVERLAPPING COMPETITIONS

North American football operates within an increasingly congested competitive framework, where players and clubs have had to adjust to navigate a dense network of overlapping competitions. What was once a relatively straightforward seasonal calendar evolved into a web of domestic leagues, international tournaments, regional cups, and global competitions, each backed by different governing bodies with distinct priorities.

This complexity is driven by the growing number of stakeholders involved in shaping the calendar. Domestic leagues such as Major League Soccer and Liga MX are primarily focused on growing fan engagement, driving revenues, and maintaining regular season integrity. At the same time, national associations prioritize participation in international tournaments like the CONCACAF Gold Cup, Nations League, and World Cup qualifiers, placing additional demands on top players. Meanwhile, continental confederations such as CONCACAF are expanding club competitions like the Champions Cup and Leagues Cup to enhance commercial and sporting relevance. Overlaying all of this is FIFA, which has introduced new global competitions such as the expanded Club World Cup, further stretching player availability.

The result is an increasingly fragmented calendar with limited coordination between governing bodies. Each competition may serve the interests of its organizer, but the cumulative effect is a relentless schedule for clubs and national teams and a shrinking margin for players to rest and recover.

North America's congested competition calendar: April–August



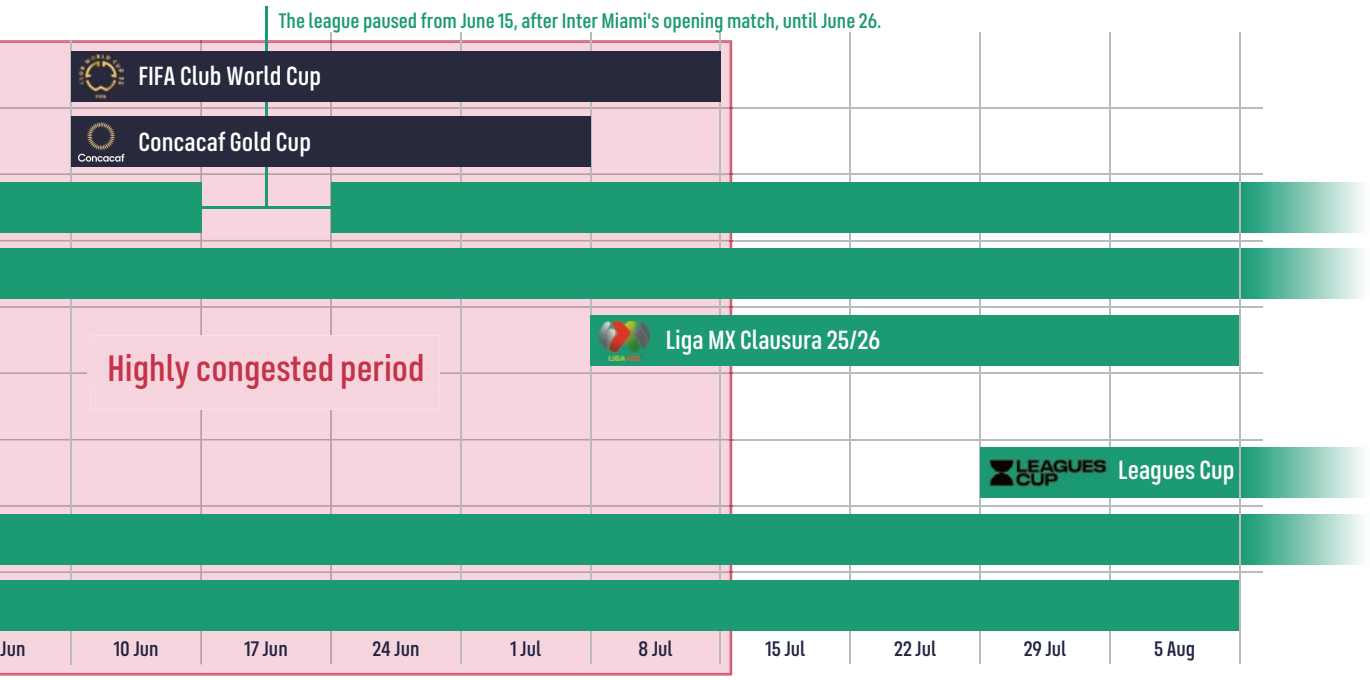
Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

OVERLAPPING CALENDARS, POSTPONED MATCHES AND PLAYER FATIGUE

This growing calendar density has led to direct scheduling clashes between major competitions. The expanded 2025 FIFA Club World Cup, for example, was held during the peak of the Major League Soccer season. Clubs such as LAFC and Inter Miami CF, were forced to postpone domestic fixtures to accommodate their Club World Cup participation, disrupting league continuity and undoubtedly creating congestion later in the year for both them and their opponents.

In several cases, the Club World Cup also conflicted with national team duties, placing players in a difficult position. The 2025 CONCACAF Gold Cup overlapped with the Club World Cup, forcing some players to choose between club and country. United States national team regulars such as Weston McKennie, Gio Reyna, and Tim Weah remained with their clubs, Juventus and Borussia Dortmund, as they competed in the Club World Cup and were therefore unavailable for international selection. Mexico did not select any players whose clubs were involved in the Club World Cup, further illustrating how national teams had to adapt their rosters due to the scheduling conflict.

These conflicts are no longer isolated. With multiple tournaments overlapping and recovery windows shrinking, the calendar strain is being felt not only by clubs and national associations but most significantly by the players themselves. Christian Pulisic, for example, withdrew from the 2025 Gold Cup in order to rest following an intense season of club and international football, underscoring the growing pressure on elite players to manage their own workload.



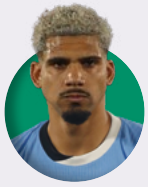
SOUTH AMERICA
Regional Workload Analysis

In South America, one of the primary workload challenges for footballers arises from the congested scheduling of multiple competitions. Data indicates that, on numerous occasions, players face national team and club commitments with very limited recovery time between matches.

Additionally, similar to the situation in Asia and Oceania, South American players based in Europe or other continents experience significant travel demands. This section will examine instances of exceptionally short recovery periods and will also explore the specific case of a Europe-based player representing a South American national team.

KEY PWM METRICS (2024/25)

Long-Distance Travel and No Time for Recovery



RONALD ARAUJO

Match #1 **25 March 2024**
Bolivia – Uruguay, 0-0
in El Alto, Bolivia

Match #2 **27 March 2024**
Barcelona – Osasuna, 3-0
in Barcelona, Spain

46 hours
Time between games

9,660 km
Distance between venues

In March 2025, Araújo had **two matches with less than 48 hours between them**. In addition, he spent 12+ hours of that time on a cross-continental flight from Bolivia to Spain.

Long Streaks of Back-to-Back Matches

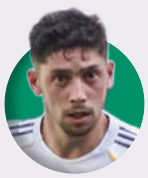
RODRYGO

19
Longest back-to-back match appearance streak

75 %
Percentage of back-to-back games out of all appearances

The Brazilian forward had **19 matches in a row without sufficient rest in a 63-day period** in early 2025.

High Volume of Games in a Congested Schedule



FEDERICO VALVERDE

72
Match appearances made

81 %
Percentage of back-to-back games out of all appearances

Valverde had a very long season, **once again surpassing 70 appearances**. Crucially, 81% of them came in back-to-back games without adequate recovery time.

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform

DANGEROUSLY SHORT RECOVERY TIME: NATIONAL TEAM AND CLUB

The data highlights that many extreme cases of insufficient recovery time between two matches occur during South American World Cup qualifiers. In the PWM dataset, we have identified seven instances where South American players had less than 48 hours to recover between a national team World Cup qualifier and a competitive club match. This highlights a challenge that likely extends beyond South America and indicates a broader issue. In other to combat this, more coordination would be needed from bodies responsible for the scheduling of national team and club competitions.

One of the shortest recovery periods was experienced by Javier Altamirano, who had only a 24-hour break between the final whistle of his World Cup qualifier against Bolivia and a domestic cup game for Club Universidad de Chile. Remarkably, Altamirano not only travelled with both teams but also played over 50 minutes in each match.

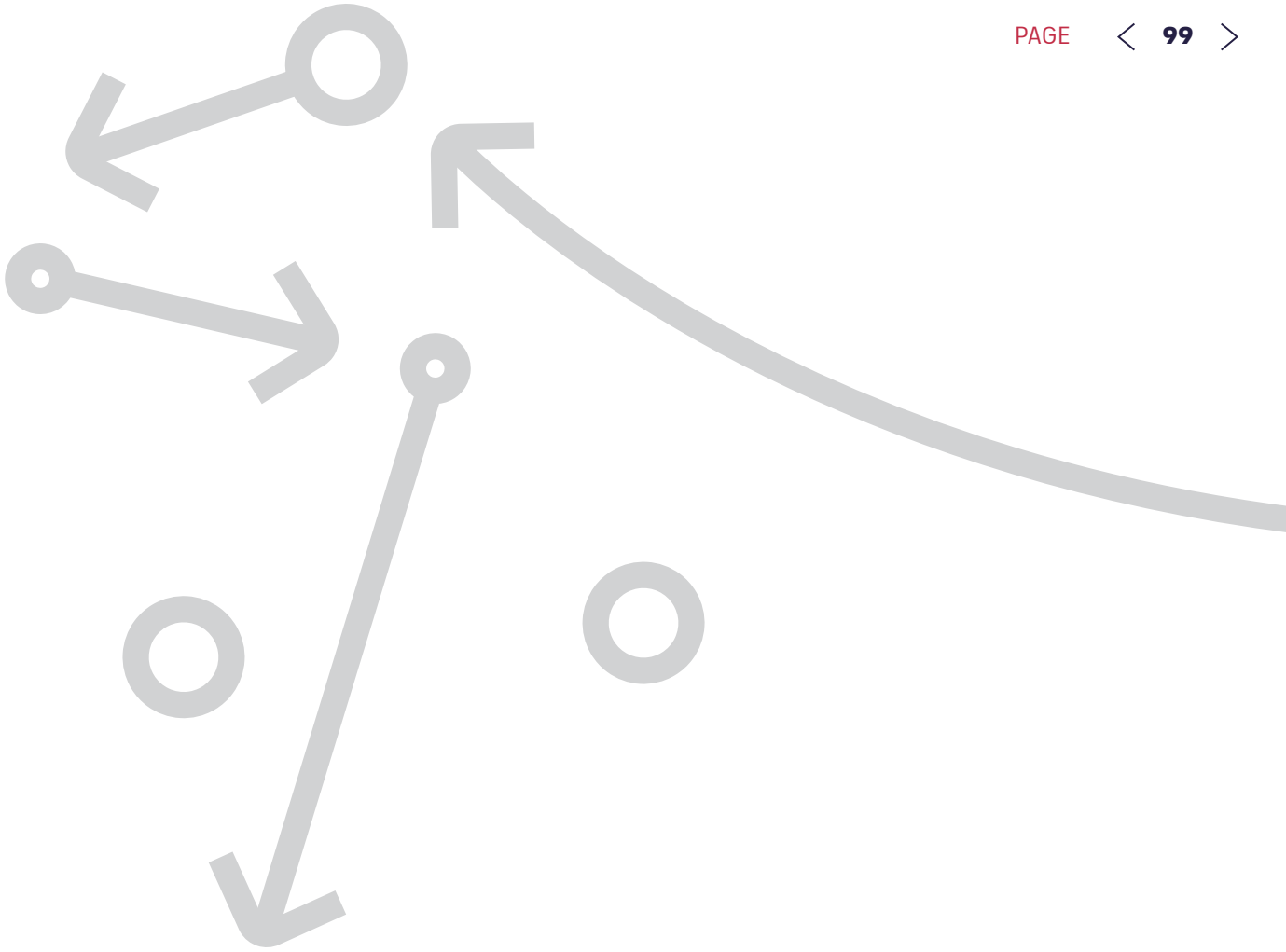
Other players on the list similarly featured for significant minutes in congested periods. For example, Junior Alonso played more than 85 minutes in both Paraguay's 1-0 loss to Brazil and Atlético Mineiro Brazilian Serie A win 46 hours later.

Although, some players did not take the field but still had to manage the physical and logistical demands of travel. Ronald Araujo illustrates this situation well: although he did not play in either Uruguay's World Cup qualifier in El Alto, Bolivia, or FC Barcelona's league match against Osasuna, he was named on the bench for both fixtures, which were only 46 hours apart and almost 10,000 kilometres distant from each other. During this period, he had to manage a heavy travel schedule, likely participated in training sessions for both teams, and spent time on the bench, all of which are part of the working time of a professional footballer.

Extremely Short Turnaround After Qualifier Games

Note: Values above match labels show how many minutes the player was on the pitch for.

Source: FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform



46.6 hours between two matches

80′
Corinthians — Palmeiras, 0–0

46 hours

0′
FC Barcelona — Osasuna, 3–0

45.8 hours

99′
Atlético Mineiro — Internacional, 2–0

45.5 hours

0′
Fortaleza — Santos, 2–3

44.7 hours

0′
New York City — Atlanta United, 4–0

43.3 hours

41′
Colo Colo — Palestini, 1–1

68′
Universidad de Chile — Cirocó Unido, 2–2

09

ANNEX


P. FORNAL
18

MEN'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 men's football.

Mission Statement & Objectives

Originally launched in 2021, the Men'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 Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform provides transparent and regular player workload updates to the football industry, covering a global sample of men's 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 Men's Player Workload Monitoring 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.

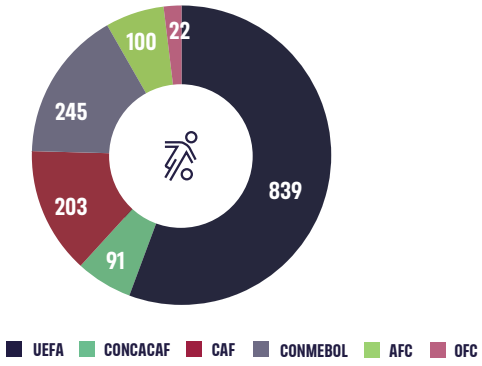
Player Sample & Profiles

There are currently 1,500 professional men'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.

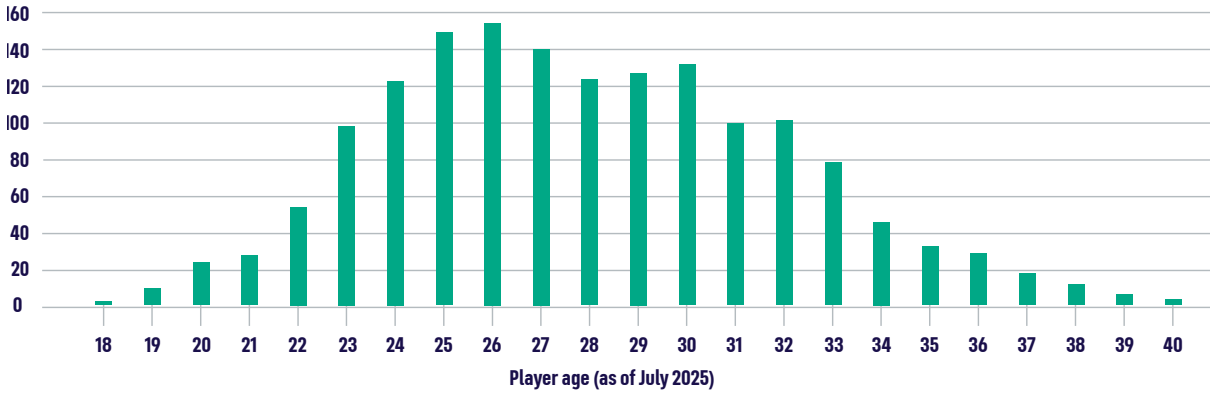
Over 100 different domestic leagues and over 500 different football clubs are represented by the players of the database as of the 2024/25 season.

Footballers of all ages between 18 and 40 are included in the current the sample. Players aged between 26 and 28 make up almost one-third of the database.

Players by nationality



Number of players by age



Seasons and Matches Covered

In total, over 400,000 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 2024 and July 2025, covering the entire 2024/25 football season. Chapter 08 takes a longer-term view as it assesses matches played between the 2019/20 and 2024/25 seasons to identify trends with regards to player segments.

As a general principle, all competitive and friendly matches for (first-team) club and (senior) national team are included in most analyses and projections of the report. There are a few exceptions for which club friendlies are not considered: Chapter 04's Global Outlook, Chapter 05' Regional Analysis and Chapter 07's Lamine Yamal case study and other historical match load comparisons.

Additional Sources

In addition to the PWM platform and new research undertaken for this report, certain sections utilise findings from other FIFPRO reports and surveys of third parties, in particular the 'Medical Position Statement on Minimum Player Workload Safeguards in Men1s Professional Football' report from June 2025.

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 (cross-border) 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.

Player workload must be understood within in a holistic view: many different aspects of work shall be considered, ranging from club competitions, national team windows, summer tournaments, club training, post- and pre-season tours, as well as other engagements such as media, fan relations or sponsorships. These all add to any individual's overall workload and include various risk factors to their well-being.

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.

MATCHDAY SQUAD INCLUSIONS – the number of times the player was part of a matchday squad. It is the sum of appearances made and the number of times the player was an unused substitute. As the player must be on stand-by even if they do not end up playing any minutes during the game, these occasions are also considered to be a crucial part of their workload.

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 for national team matches played abroad. Only cross-border trips are considered.

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
FOOTBALL PLAYERS WORLDWIDE

fifpro.org

info@fifpro.org

+31 23 554 6970

Scorpius 161,
2132 LR Hoofddorp
Netherlands

This report was developed in cooperation with Football Benchmark

Photo cover by:
Imago

Main photo sources:
Imago