

# 2024 AFRICAN PLAYER WORKLOAD REPORT

PILOT ANALYSIS

FIFPRO Player Workload Monitoring



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**FOREWORD** ..... 4

**01**  
**KEY FINDINGS** ..... 6

**02**  
**AFRICA-BASED PLAYERS' WORKLOAD ANALYSIS** ..... 10

Introduction and methodology ..... 12

Match load ..... 15

Recovery ..... 19

International travel load ..... 21

**03**  
**LANDSCAPE OF AFRICAN FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS** ..... 24

Introduction ..... 26

Domestic League Competitions ..... 26

Size of first division leagues ..... 27

Minimum number of matches played ..... 28

First division leagues by professional status .. 29

**International Club Competitions** ..... 30

CAF Champions League, CAF Confederation Cup and CAF Super Cup ..... 30

African Football League ..... 31

**National Team Competitions** ..... 32

CAF Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) ..... 32

CAF African Nations Championship ..... 33

**Case Study: AFCON's impact on Europe-based African players** ..... 34

**04**  
**MATCH CALENDAR ANALYSIS AND PROJECTION** ..... 36

Introduction and methodology ..... 38

Match load projection ..... 39

Player 1 - Teboho Mokoena ..... 39

Player 2 - Yusuf Maart ..... 40

Player 3 - Achraf Hakimi ..... 41

Actual and projected appearances ..... 42

**05**  
**METHODOLOGY** ..... 44

**Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform** ..... 46

**Terms & Definitions** ..... 48



# FOREWORD

With this pilot study, the first of its kind, FIFPRO Africa aims to provide an African perspective on player workload. Our intention is threefold:

1. to shine a light on the workload situation facing African players;
2. to provide a voice for African players within and outside the African continent;
3. to facilitate the discussions at the African and global level on performance, competitions and employment conditions.

For too long, critical decisions about the match calendar have been made in isolation and without genuine consultation with players or a comprehensive understanding of the impacts on their health, performance and employment.

New competition formats, unilaterally imposed, threaten the viability of national leagues and the employment of our players. Not just in Europe but also here in Africa. New competitions or adaptations to current formats will change the structure of work for players in terms of games, travel, training, time spent and rest and recovery. This is yet another year with little rest after a long and draining season, with the national competitions, the CAF Champions League and even the FIFA Club World Cup for some. Next season, exclude the latter, but include AFCON and the FIFA World Cup, two highly demanding month-long tournaments within six months of each other. Players want to shine on the big stage, but the calendar must be built in a way that allows them that opportunity.

The balance that we try to find in all parts of our society – the balance between the local, the regional, the national, and the international – is critical and needs to be preserved also in the football sector. Moving forward, such decisions must be taken collaboratively, and mindful of the realities players and national competitions face.

But we are not here just to complain. As player unions we are ready to play a pragmatic role to create a better, more sustainable and reliable competition environment for our industry.

In November 2024 the International Labour Organization (ILO) agreed to convene an expert meeting on social dialogue in the professional sports sector, which will be held in early 2026. The ILO Governing Body has given an important reminder that when it comes to professional sport, cooperation on labour matters and economic development must go hand in hand. The time until the next expert meeting is an opportunity for African football stakeholders to advance sustainable market development in the football sector through social dialogue and collective agreements – including for example on player welfare, performance and competition design.

While the need for global solutions is clear, it is essential that these solutions account for the unique challenges faced by players in each region, particularly in Africa. Talking about regional specificities implies mentioning the additional burden that comes with challenging travel logistics and conditions, as well as extreme heat and climate conditions. It also means acknowledging that Africa is a diverse continent, not least in what regards professional football, and therefore while a group of players are indeed confronted with a real risk of overload, others may face the inverse risk of underload.

This diversity that also includes the African footprint of players in the biggest leagues in the world must be considered when it comes to finding solutions – as FIFPRO Africa, we hope this pilot study will serve as a catalyst for meaningful collaboration and social dialogue on these matters.

**Geremie Njitap**  
President, FIFPRO Africa



# 01

## KEY FINDINGS

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# 01

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

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.

Below you can read the most important trends & key findings.

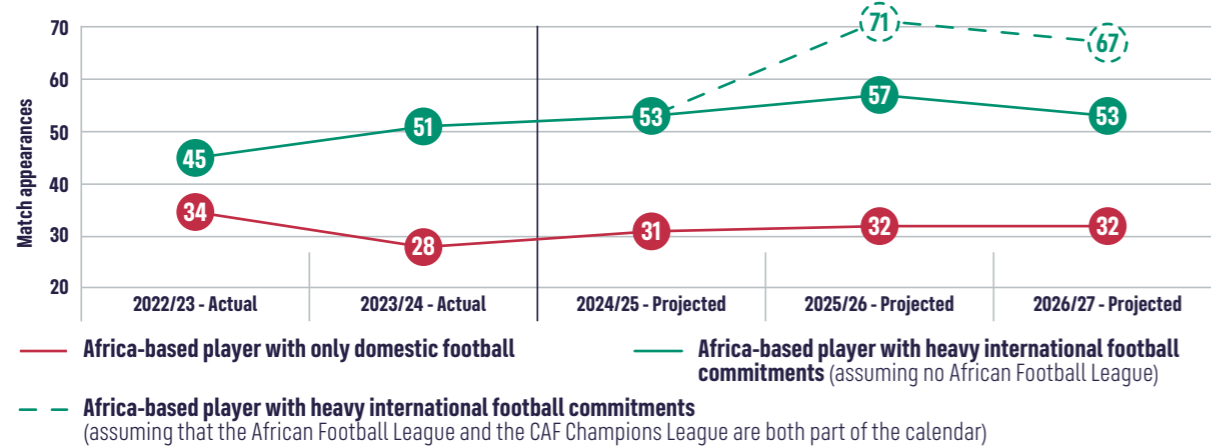
### 01



#### AFRICA-BASED PLAYERS WITH INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS FACE HEAVY 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.

Actual and projected appearances for different player profiles (2022/23 – 2026/27)



### 02



#### 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.

Number of domestic first division leagues based on minimum gameweeks in 2023/2024



### 03



#### 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.

### 04



#### 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.

##### Report insights



**100,000+ kilometres**  
International flight distance accumulated by Mamelodi Sundowns players over the course of 2023/24



**2.5 times**  
Travel distance burden equating to 2.5 times the length of the Equator

### 05



#### 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.

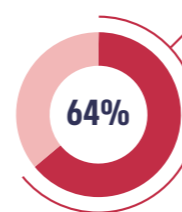
### 06



#### 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 fulfil national team duties. This adds to an already demanding calendar, causing friction with clubs and placing added physical and mental strain on players.

##### Report insights



Percentage of AFCON 2023 participating players who belonged to a European club at the time of the tournament



**8 club matches**  
Number of games played by his club side while Calvin Bassey (Nigeria) participated at AFCON 2023

### 07

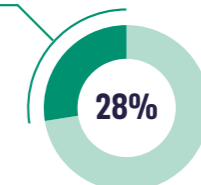


#### AFCON II: NON-PARTICIPATING AFRICA-BASED PLAYERS FACE AN UNEVEN WORKLOAD

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.

##### Report insights

Percentage of AFCON 2023 participating players who were employed by African club sides at the time of the tournament



# 02

## AFRICA-BASED PLAYERS' WORKLOAD ANALYSIS

Building on a sample of 60 professional football players from six different country's first division leagues, this chapter attempts to translate the diverse landscape of African football into match load, recovery and travel load statistics. The objective is to showcase what differences in access to competitions can mean for players' workload.



# 02 / AFRICA-BASED PLAYERS' WORKLOAD ANALYSIS

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

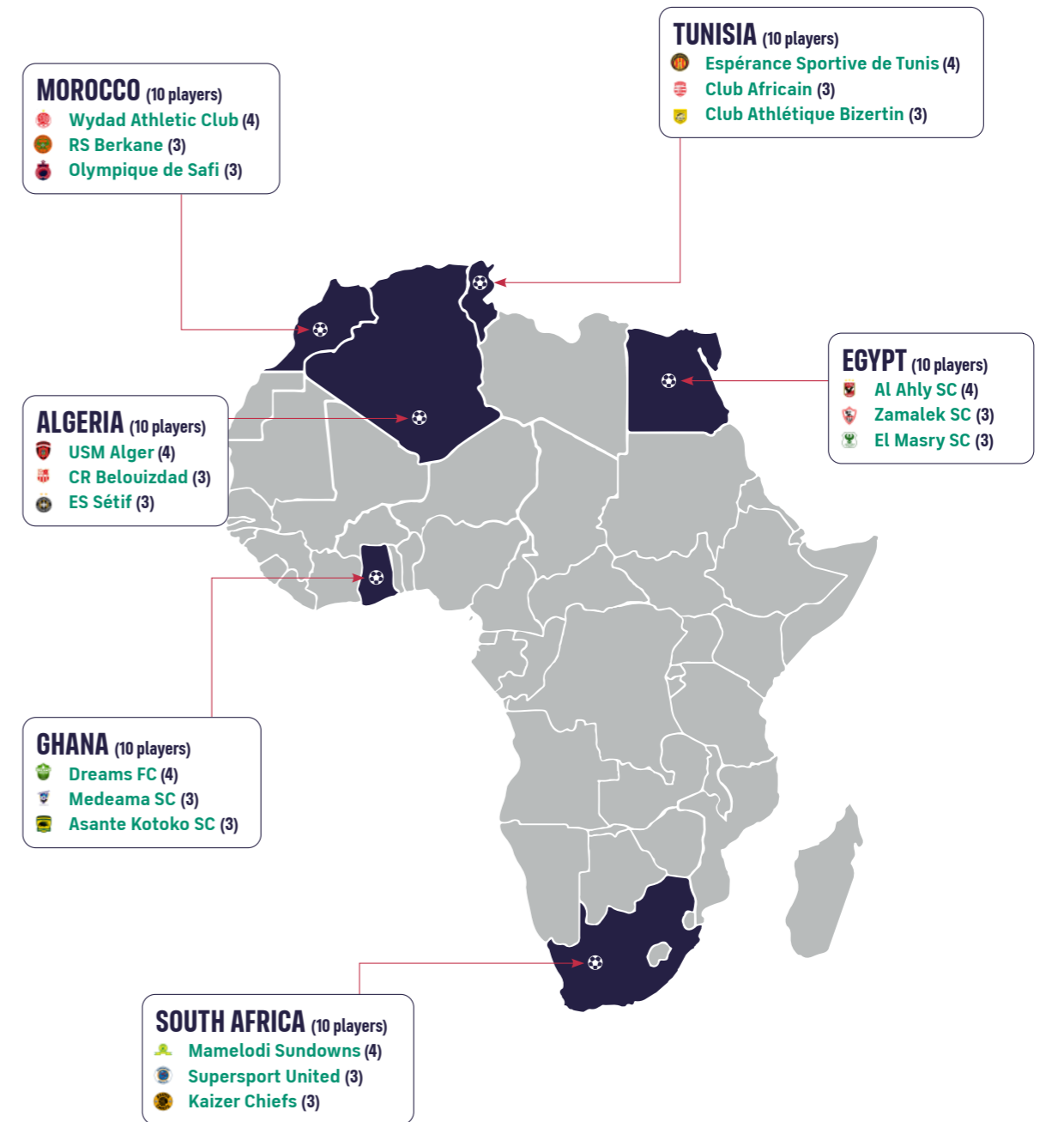
African football, just like the continent itself, is very diverse. As probably the most popular sport in almost every country of Africa, football plays a pivotal role in communities. The level of development shows great variance, and elite players are subjected to a variety of challenges. But how different are their workload realities, actually? The objective is to shed some light on this topic and quantify the diversity of African footballers from various perspectives.

In this chapter, we first select and categorise a sample of African footballers based on their general workload statistics. In the next step we assess what different competition mixes can lead to in terms of match load, recovery and travel load for different player categories.

### Player sample selection principles

- **Data availability:** first and foremost, the main database challenge of the analysis must be mentioned. Unfortunately, match statistics about most domestic competitions in Africa are often scarce, which limited the scope of leagues from which players could be selected from.  
It should be noted that even if a player was selected for the analysis sample, it did not guarantee that all of their matches were considered. While we did all we could to build a completed database from multiple sources, the lack of reliable team sheets and statistics for certain competitions meant that a small percentage of match appearances had to be excluded.
- **Season scope:** 2022/23 and 2023/24 (generally from July 2022 until August 2024).
- **League and player scope:** players that played for the same club in both seasons in the first division leagues of Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Morocco, South Africa or Tunisia were eligible for selection. All players must have been important members of their clubs who were available for most games and did not have long-term injuries.
- **Match scope:** competitive club matches and all national team matches made up the match database. Club friendly matches were excluded. In the case of national team games, youth and Olympic squads were considered where it was relevant.  
Club matches were further broken down into domestic (e.g., Egyptian Premier League, Egyptian Cup, etc.) and international type games (e.g., CAF Champions League).
- **Metric scope:** match load, recovery (back-to-back matches), international travel load.

From which clubs were players selected from exactly?



**Final sample for analysis**  
60 players from 18 different clubs across 6 countries and 2 seasons

### Player workload categories

Next step was to assign both seasons of all 60 players into one of three categories based on the general make-up of their match load. This added an important dimension to the analysis that followed.

Acknowledging that 60 players might not seem adequate for such an undertaking, we made sure that subjects with similar workload features were selected for each category and that none of the groups had comparatively too few representatives. This enabled us to draw preliminary conclusions about the workload reality of those groups.

Since two, fully completed football seasons were included for all players, in total we had 60x2=120 player-season pairings in the sample.

60 players across two seasons

120 player-season pairs

**Category #1**  
MOSTLY DOMESTIC MATCH LOAD

A player's season was assigned to this category if they had maximum four international club or national team appearances in that period and the rest of their match load consisted of domestic league and/or cup games.  
**Example player: Ashley Du Preez (Kaizer Chiefs)**

40

**Category size**

**40**  
player-season pairs  
across 2022/23 and 2023/24

**Category #2**  
DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CLUB COMPETITION MIX

A player's season was assigned to this category if they had at least four international club appearances in that period but had maximum three matches for their respective national teams.  
**Example player: Islam Merili (USM Alger)**

44

**Category size**

**44**  
player-season pairs  
across 2022/23 and 2023/24

**Category #3**  
HEAVY INTERNATIONAL MATCH LOAD, INCLUDING NATIONAL TEAM

A player's season was assigned to this category if they had at least four appearances in domestic club, international club and national team competitions alike in that period. Many players in this group are core members of clubs with deep international cup runs who also play national team football regularly.  
**Example player: Mohamed El Shenawy (Al Ahly SC and Egypt NT)**

36

**Category size**

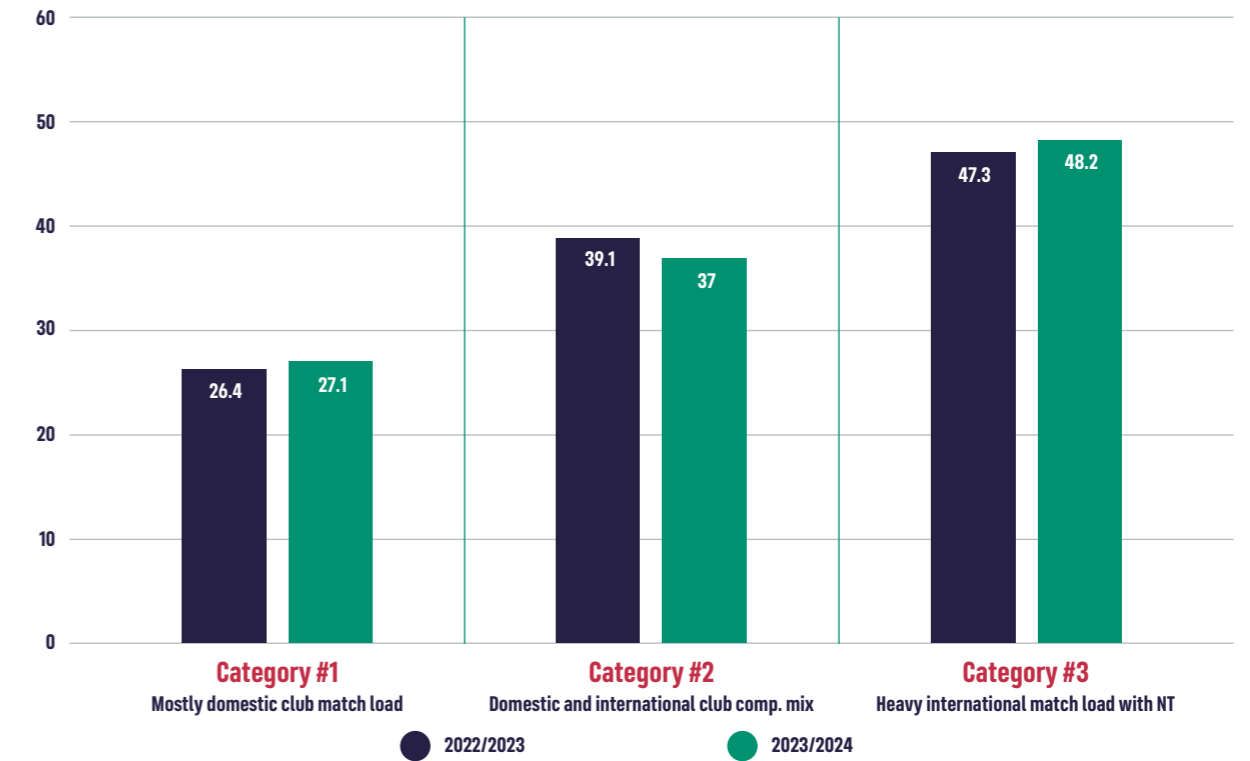
**36**  
player-season pairs  
across 2022/23 and 2023/24

## MATCH LOAD

**Players with international commitments can play up to twice as much as those without**

One of the most important metrics for measuring player workload is the number of appearances they make over a period of time. In this section, the three defined player categories are compared to each other based on what their members on average achieved in the last two full seasons in terms of appearances.

### How many appearances did an average member of a player category make in a season?



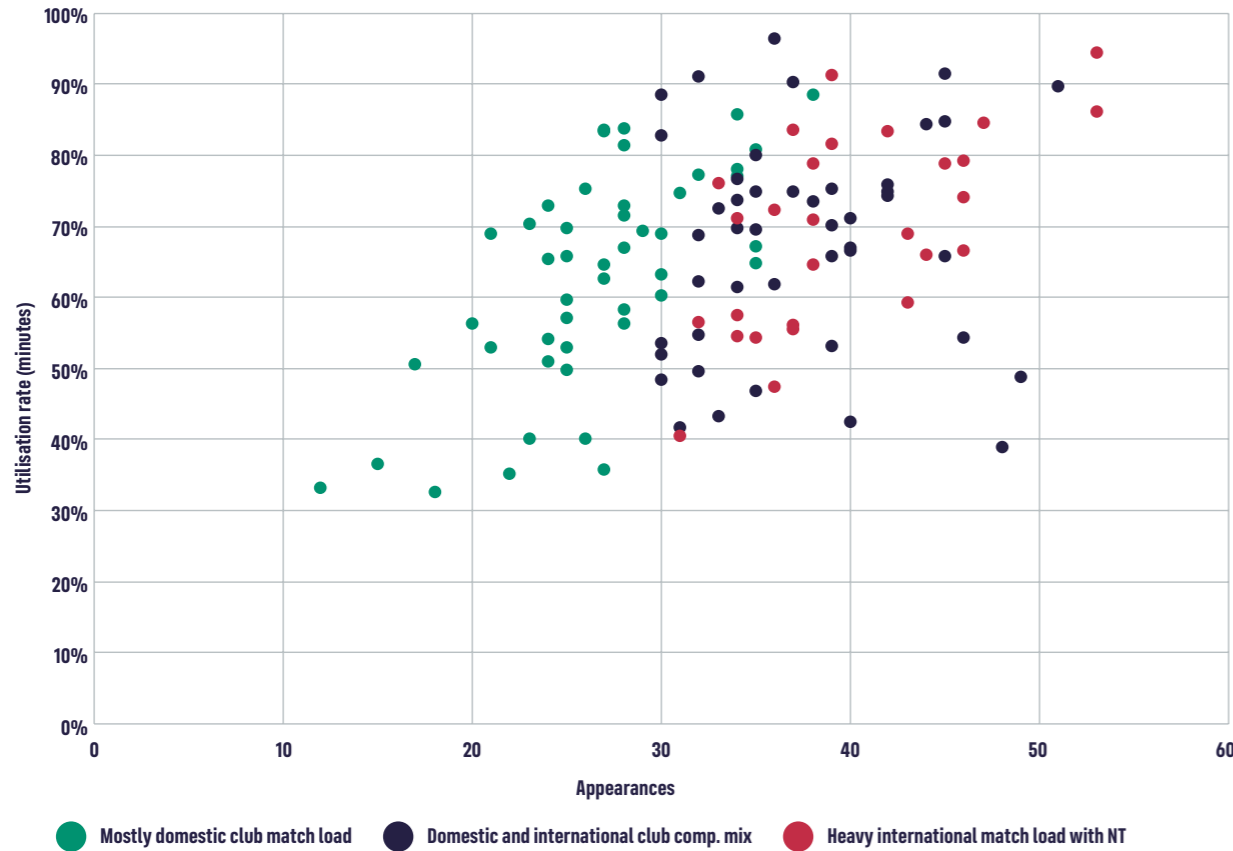
Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

### KEY INSIGHTS

- » There is clearly large differences between the categories in both of the analysed seasons.
- » Category #1's results are equivalent to just under one full game for every two weeks during a calendar year. Since these professionals only have to focus on domestic league and occasional cup matches, their overall workload is limited and could almost be characterised as "underload".
- » In comparison Category #3's figures are almost double that of Category #1. International matches, especially national team tournaments, are clearly important drivers of match load.
- » It should also be noted that as the 47-48 appearances made are averages, there are several players in our sample for Category #3 who played much more than that and were thus above the "overload" threshold specified by FIFPRO (55 appearances in a season). **This implies that there is a group of Africa-based players whose match calendars are already "packed" and whose situation should be monitored more closely.**
- » Finally, the results for all three categories show little variation between the two seasons; there was not one major event or reform that impacted all of them equally.



**Total appearances made and utilisation rate**  
2022/23 and 2023/24, every marker is a player-season pairing

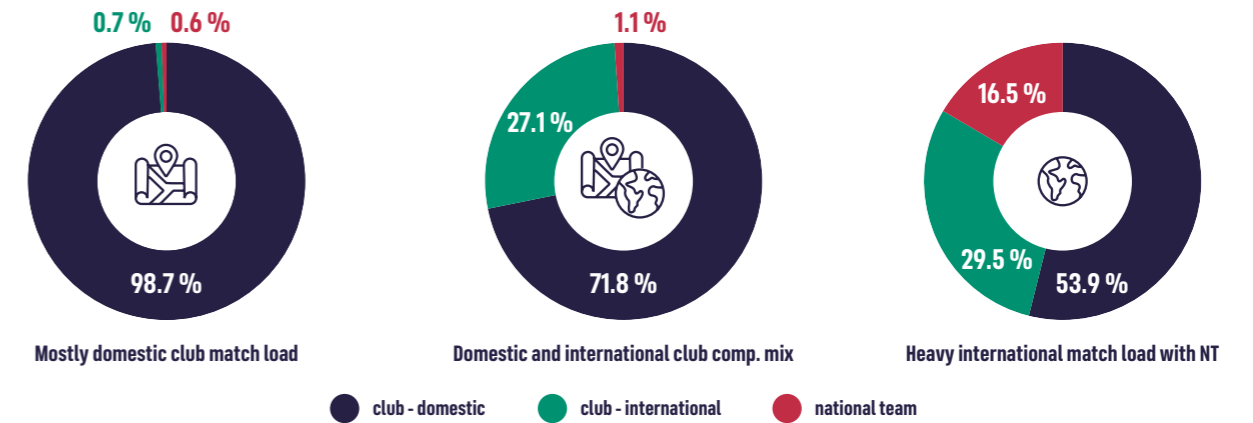


Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

**KEY INSIGHTS**

- » Adding another dimension to the analysis by comparing appearances with the players' utilisation rate. The latter metric is calculated by dividing the number of minutes played by the total number of minutes of their club side over the same period. Importantly, this metric considers only competitive club matches and thus national team competitions are not included in its calculation.
- » The average utilisation rate for Category #1 players was 63%, while for Category #2 and #3 it was 68% and 70%, respectively. It should be noted that since national team games are excluded from this particular analysis, Category #2 and #3 players represent a very similar competition mix.
- » The spread within categories is quite similar across all three with utilisation rate below 50% and above 80% all quite common in them. However, there is a significant difference in the total number of games their clubs played. **This finding implies that rotation within a team's squad is not necessarily more frequent the more matches they are involved in.**
- » Ahmed Khalil, Tunisian midfielder of Club Africain, is the only player in the 60-player sample who recorded 90%+ utilisation rate for his club in both of the analysed seasons.

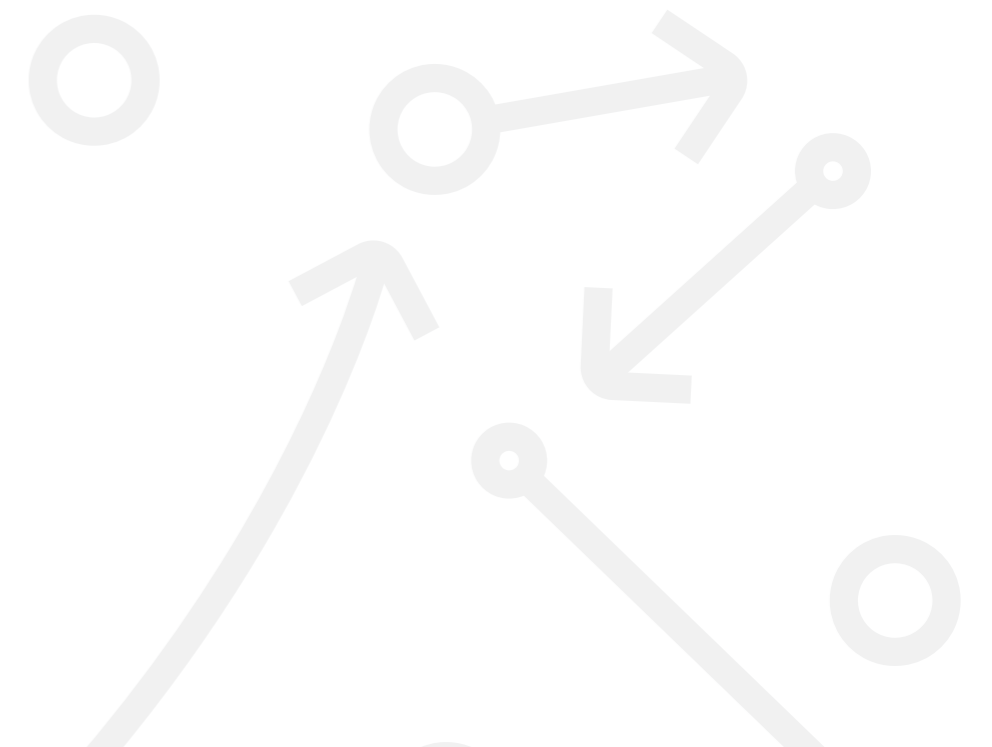
**Competition type mix by player category (2022/23 and 2023/24 combined)**



Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

**KEY INSIGHTS**

- » The collection of three charts above display the average match calendar composition of the three player categories. Immediately, it is visible that there are great variations between them, but this is expected as the definition of the categories was largely based on the competition mix.
- » International matches of any kind are virtually non-existent for Category #1, while Categories #2 and #3 gradually add international club matches and then national team games, leading to a more balanced mix.
- » Interestingly, when considering only domestic, national cup clashes (which are a segment of the 'club - domestic' type), we find that players in all three categories accumulated roughly 300 minutes per season. **As there is not much variance in this regard, we can assume that even though Category #2 and #3 players usually have more match commitments, they are still unlikely to be rested for domestic cups.** This might be surprising, given that these national cups are sometimes deemed less prestigious than a league or a CAF Champions League game.



**Top 10 players with the highest match load - 2022/23 season**

Player profile						Appearances made				Matchday squad inclusions	Minutes played
League (country)	Club (2022/23)	Player	Age (November 2024)	Nationality	Position	Total	of which: club - domestic	of which: club - international	of which: national team	Total	Total minutes on pitch
Egypt	AL AHLY SC	MOHAMED EL SHENAWY	35	Egypt	Goalkeeper	59	37	16	6	59	5,886
Egypt	ZAMALEK SC	ZIZO	28	Egypt	Midfielder	59	40	13	6	60	5,412
Morocco	WYDAD ATHLETIC CLUB	AYOUB EL AMLOUD	30	Morocco	Defender	52	33	18	1	55	4,989
Morocco	WYDAD ATHLETIC CLUB	YAHYA JABRANE	33	Morocco	Midfielder	52	29	18	5	60	4,848
Algeria	CR BELOUIZDAD	YOUCEF LAOUAFI	28	Algeria	Defender	52	31	14	7	53	4,576
Tunisia	ESPÉRANCE DE TUNIS	YASSINE MERIAH	31	Tunisia	Defender	49	27	15	7	49	4,634
Egypt	AL AHLY SC	MOHAMED HANY	28	Egypt	Defender	49	29	17	3	59	4,396
Egypt	AL AHLY SC	MOHAMED MAGDY AFSHA	28	Egypt	Midfielder	49	37	12	-	60	3,043
Egypt	AL AHLY SC	MOHAMED ABDELMONEM	25	Egypt	Defender	48	25	18	5	50	4,724
Algeria	USM ALGER	ZINEDDINE BELAÏD	25	Algeria	Defender	47	23	16	8	48	4,500

Note: the ranking considers only the 60 players who were selected for the analysis of Chapter 02.

**Top 10 players with the highest match load - 2023/24 season**

Player profile						Appearances made				Matchday squad inclusions	Minutes played
League (country)	Club (2023/24)	Player	Age (November 2024)	Nationality	Position	Total	of which: club - domestic	of which: club - international	of which: national team	Total	Total minutes on pitch
Egypt	AL AHLY SC	MOHAMED ABDELMONEM	25	Egypt	Defender	60	27	19	14	63	5,963
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	RONWEN WILLIAMS	32	South Africa	Goalkeeper	59	29	17	13	62	5,881
Egypt	AL AHLY SC	MOHAMED HANY	28	Egypt	Defender	55	24	20	11	67	5,015
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	AUBREY MODIBA	29	South Africa	Midfielder	53	23	13	17	59	4,205
Tunisia	ESPÉRANCE DE TUNIS	YASSINE MERIAH	31	Tunisia	Defender	51	21	18	12	51	4,954
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	TEBOHO MOKOENA	27	South Africa	Midfielder	51	23	14	14	54	4,573
Egypt	ZAMALEK SC	ZIZO	28	Egypt	Midfielder	50	21	11	18	52	4,318
Egypt	AL AHLY SC	MOHAMED MAGDY AFSHA	28	Egypt	Midfielder	50	30	18	2	59	2,545
Egypt	ZAMALEK SC	HAMZA MATHLOUTHI	32	Tunisia	Defender	47	32	13	2	49	4,680
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	KHULISO MUDAU	29	South Africa	Defender	47	19	16	12	51	4,276

Note: the ranking considers only the 60 players who were selected for the analysis of Chapter 02.

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

**KEY INSIGHTS**

- » Two separate rankings show the players with highest match load in the last two completed seasons based on the number of appearances. It is clear from both tables that international club football was a major driver; everyone in both Top 10 rankings accumulated at least 11 such appearances (mostly in the CAF Champions League or the Confederations Cup).
- » Five out of six leagues selected for our analysis (all except Ghana) have at least one representative in one of the tables, showing that **high match load is possible in different domestic club settings.**
- » One of the key features analysis is the high number of representatives from Egyptian club, Al Ahly SC. All four players of the club chosen for our sample are in the Top 10 for the 2022/23 season, while all but one also appears in the 2023/24 ranking, as well.
- » This is a testament to the club's recent success on the international front, as well as to the condensed Egyptian football calendar. The club participated in the 34-round first division, the Egyptian Cup and the Super Cup, as well. Their match load could have been even higher if Al Ahly did not withdraw from the last two editions of the Egyptian League Cup citing - unsurprisingly - fixture congestion as one of the reasons.
- » There is just one player in either table without national team appearances: Afsha remarkably made it into the top 10 in 2022/23 even with zero such matches. However, it should be mentioned that even in that season he was on the bench for an Egyptian national team match.

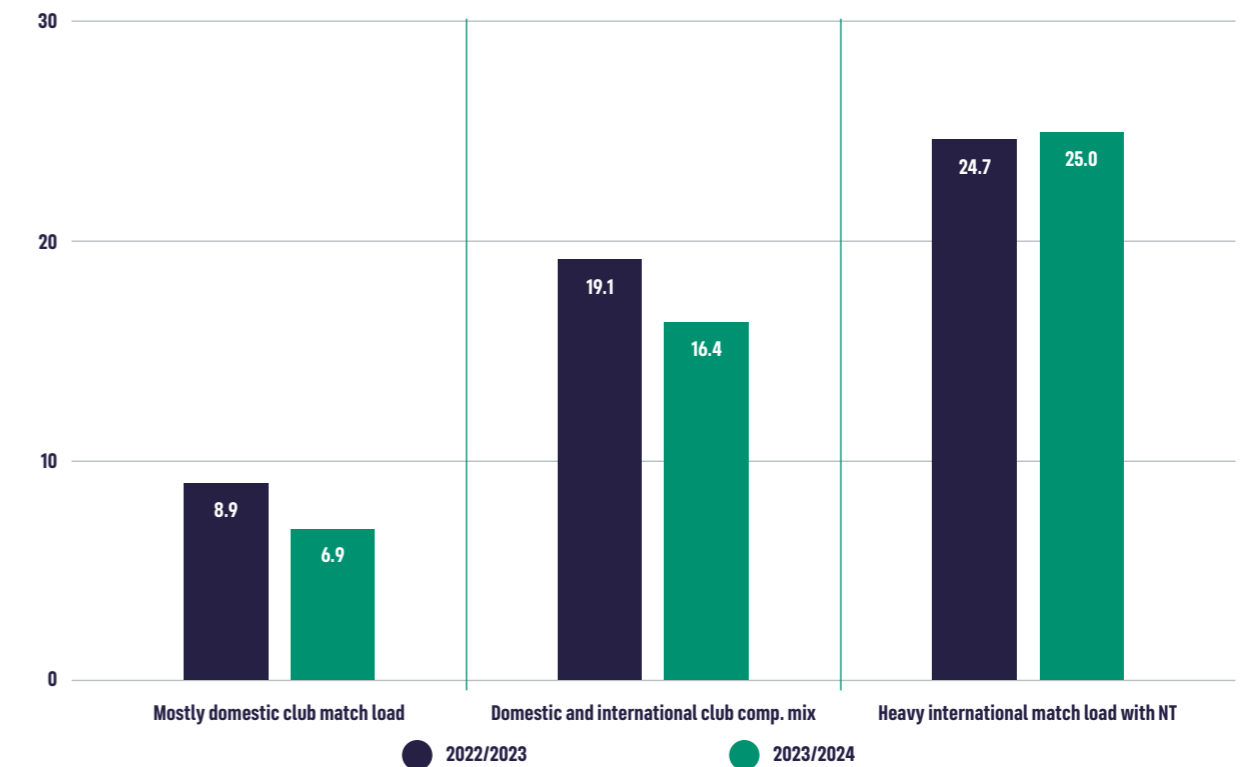
**RECOVERY**

**Condensed calendars of top players leave little time for adequate recovery**

While certainly crucial, taking the volume of matches is not enough on its own to ascertain the workload level of players. This is where the number of back-to-back appearances comes into play.

According to the established methodology of the FIFPRO Men's Player Workload Monitoring (PWM) platform, 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). Simply put, a high number of back-to-back games could indicate a high level of congestion in the match calendar as appearances pile up in a condensed period. For the player, this means a lack of recovery and adequate training for players, further increasing the risk of fatigue and injury.

**How many back-to-back appearances did an average member of a player category make in a season?**



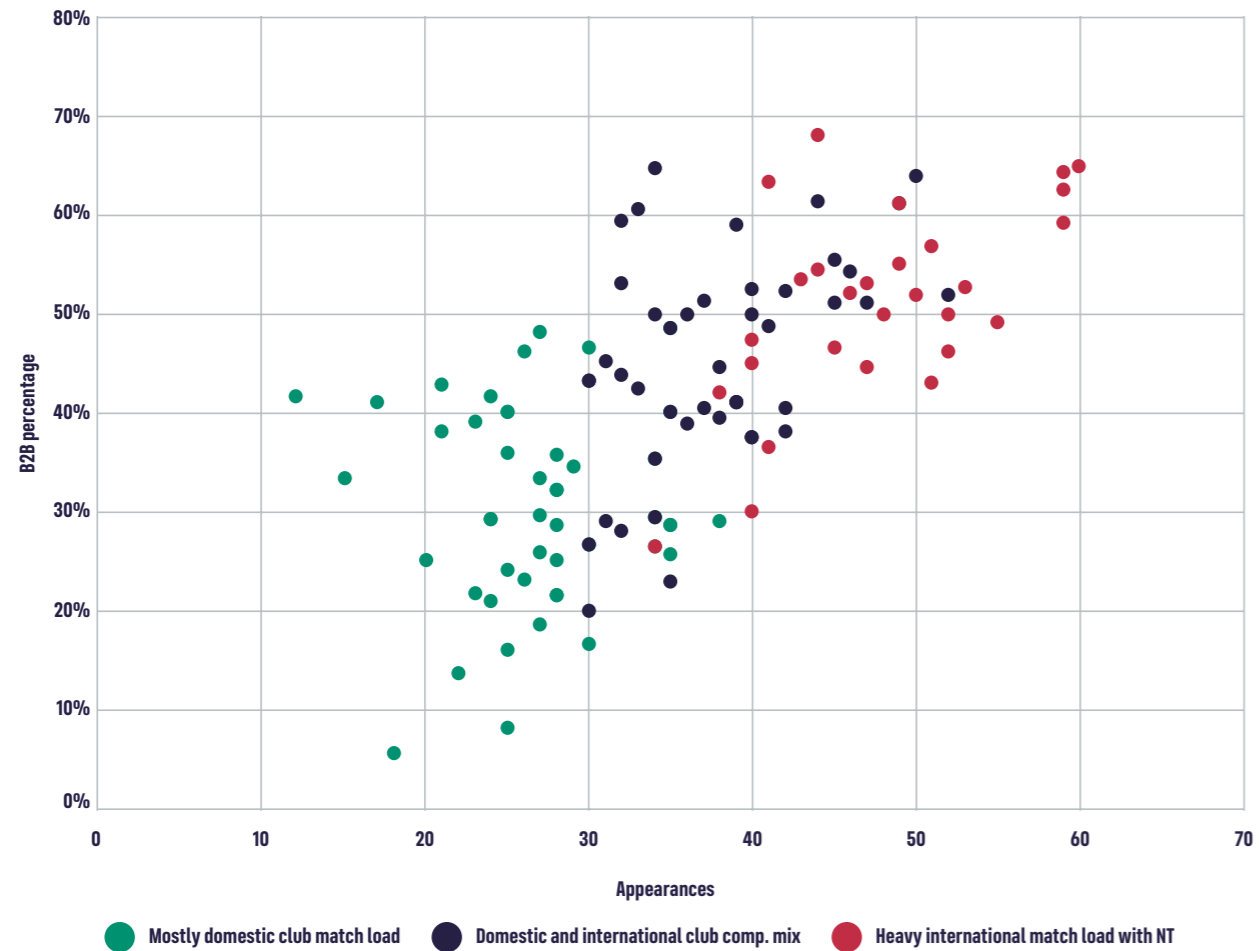
Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

**KEY INSIGHTS**

- » Looking at the average back-to-back appearances recorded by the three player categories, similar trends become evident as in the case of overall appearances. However, a key difference is in the magnitude of variance: an average Category #3 player had around three times as many back-to-back games as an average member of Category #1.
- » Those with a mix of domestic and international club games and without many national team commitments (Category #2) are between the two other categories. An average player in their group had 19 and 16 back-to-back games in 2022/23 and 2023/24, respectively.
- » Players often build an uninterrupted streak of such matches, which is even more challenging. **In our sample of 60 players, streaks of 7-9 games were not uncommon with the longest ones recorded by players of Al Ahly, RS Berkane and Wydad AC. These signal periods during which the players did not get sufficient time for recovery for up to 5 weeks, playing twice a week.**

### Total appearances made and % of back-to-back appearances

2022/23 and 2023/24, every marker is a player-season pairing



Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

#### KEY INSIGHTS

- » Plotting the percentage of back-to-back games next to total appearances for every analysed player and season uncovers important findings.
- » For example, no player in Category #1 had a higher than 50% share of back-to-back games in a single season. Given their limited range of competitions, these footballers rarely had two games within the span of a single week.
- » For the other two categories, 50%+ back-to-back shares were the norm rather than the exceptions. **Some players reached shares closer to 70%, meaning that over two-thirds of their season was spent at breakneck pace with matches closely following each other.**

## INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL LOAD

High match load often leads to similarly high travel load throughout competitions

Playing matches is just one part of a player's workload. In addition to regular trainings, another major factor is the time they have to spend getting to match locations and then back. Travelling to games, especially far away from home, can often take a long time and involve delays. Above all, these are additional periods they have to spend away from their families.

In this section, the time players spent with international trips for either club or national team duties are analysed. The basis of the calculation is the actual travel (flight) times; as a result, time spent going to and from the airport is not accounted for. Furthermore, only cross-border trips are the focus in this assessment, which means that trips made for domestic league or cup matches within their home countries are excluded. Especially in countries with a large area, the trips related to the latter would not be negligible either.



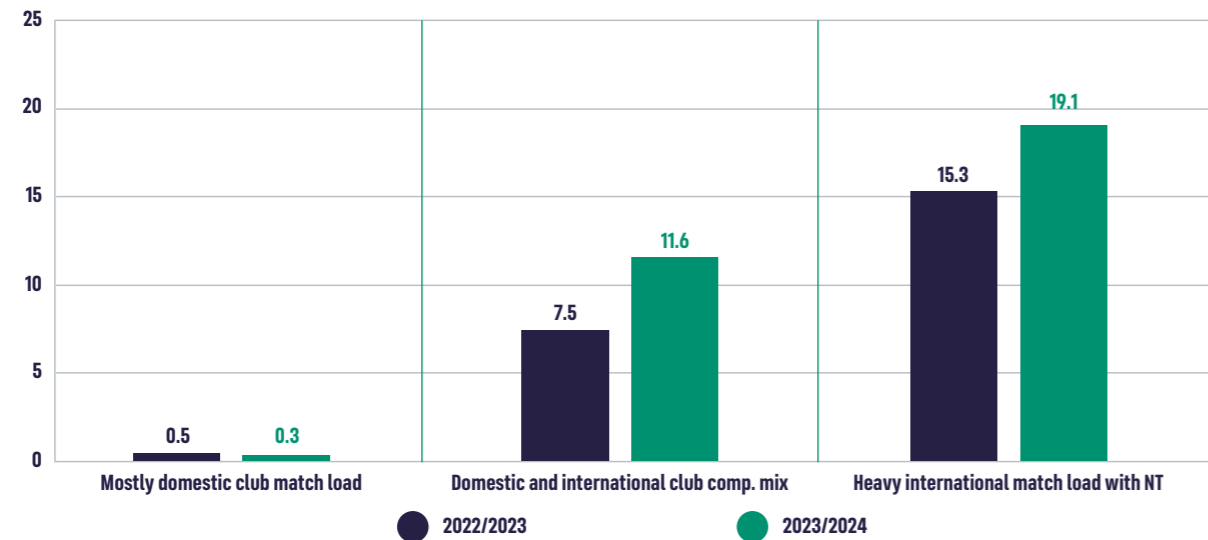
### TRAVEL CONDITIONS IN AFRICAN FOOTBALL

While top clubs in Europe and around the world often make use of charter flights to get to and from away games, somewhat alleviating the rigors of international travel, this type of service is rarely afforded to players of African teams.

In addition, moving within the African continent presents its own logistical challenges as direct flights between (capital) cities are not always available. As a result, teams often have to make layovers to reach their destinations. It is not unheard of that an African national team going to an away game in a different region of the continent has to make a transfer somewhere in Europe (perhaps in France) to eventually make it to the game.

Finally, other factors could also make travelling an even bigger burden for players than it perhaps needs to be. In October 2024 the Nigerian national team travelled to Libya for an important AFCON qualifying clash. They were due to arrive in Benghazi, the location of the match, but were redirected to land at an abandoned airport some 230 kilometres away. The Nigerian delegation declined to embark on an unplanned, three-hour bus drive to the venue, because the environment was deemed to be high-risk. It was widely reported that the players thus found themselves stranded at the airport for more than 12 hours without food or water, which led them to eventually boycott the match. CAF labeled the incident "disturbing and unacceptable" and ultimately awarded a 3-0 win to Nigeria.

### How many international trips did an average member of a player category make by season?



Note: for details about what is included in 'international travel', please refer to 'Chapter 05 - Methodology'.  
Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

#### KEY INSIGHTS

- » Given how the categories were defined, it is not surprising to see that there is almost no international trips recorded in the case of Category #1 players.
- » The other two categories gradually add more international club competition and then national team competition related travel burden. For example, an average member of the 'heavy international match load with national team' category made almost 35 trips to international club games over the last two seasons combined. A huge portion of these trips also involved travelling long distances, requiring players to be away from their families for a significant amount of time.
- » **To illustrate the issue of distance, South African Mamelodi Sundowns players in our sample accumulated over 100,000 kilometres of international travel each over the course of the 2023/24 season. This equates to around 2.5 times the entire length of the Equator.**
- » Competitions such as AFCON in 2023/24 and the CAF Champions League and the African Football League were the main sources of travel load.

### Top 10 players with the highest international travel load - 2022/23 season

Player profile						Travel statistics		
League (country)	Club (2022/23)	Player	Age (November 2024)	Nationality	Position	Time spent with travelling (hours)	Total travel distance (km)	Total trips made
Morocco	WYDAD ATHLETIC CLUB	YAHYA JABRANE	33	Morocco	Midfielder	114.4	85,929	23
Morocco	WYDAD ATHLETIC CLUB	AYOUB EL AMLAUD	30	Morocco	Defender	107.9	81,746	19
Algeria	USM ALGER	ZINEDDINE BELAÏD	25	Algeria	Defender	107.2	81,448	18
Algeria	USM ALGER	OUSSAMA CHITA	28	Algeria	Midfielder	107.2	81,448	18
Morocco	WYDAD ATHLETIC CLUB	AMINE ABOULFATH	27	Morocco	Defender	100.9	76,636	17
Morocco	WYDAD ATHLETIC CLUB	SAIFEDDINE BOUHRA	24	Morocco	Forward	96.8	73,401	17
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	RONWEN WILLIAMS	32	South Africa	Goalkeeper	92.5	71,275	12
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	TEBOHO MOKOENA	27	South Africa	Midfielder	92.5	71,275	12
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	AUBREY MODIBA	29	South Africa	Midfielder	92.5	71,275	12
Egypt	AL AHLY SC	MOHAMED EL SHENAWY	35	Egypt	Goalkeeper	80.9	59,526	21

Note: the ranking considers only the 60 players who were selected for the analysis of Chapter 02. For details about what is included in 'international travel', please refer to 'Chapter 05 - Methodology'.

### Top 10 players with the highest international travel load - 2023/24 season

Player profile						Travel statistics		
League (country)	Club (2023/24)	Player	Age (November 2024)	Nationality	Position	Time spent with travelling (hours)	Total travel distance (km)	Total trips made
Tunisia	ESPÉRANCE DE TUNIS	YASSINE MERIAH	31	Algeria	Defender	155.2	118,248	25
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	RONWEN WILLIAMS	32	South Africa	Goalkeeper	154.0	116,466	28
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	AUBREY MODIBA	29	South Africa	Midfielder	150.5	113,905	27
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	TEBOHO MOKOENA	27	South Africa	Midfielder	133.7	100,636	26
Tunisia	ESPÉRANCE DE TUNIS	MOHAMED AMINE TOUGAI	24	Tunisia	Defender	128.8	95,639	30
Egypt	AL AHLY SC	MOHAMED HANY	28	South Africa	Defender	125.2	94,312	24
South Africa	MAMELODI SUNDOWNS	KHULISO MUDAU	29	Egypt	Defender	122.2	91,694	25
Egypt	AL AHLY SC	MOHAMED ABDELMONEM	25	Egypt	Defender	114.1	85,936	22
Tunisia	CLUB AFRICAÏN	MOUEZ HASSEN	29	Egypt	Midfielder	98.9	74,546	19
Egypt	ZAMALEK SC	ZIZO	28	Tunisia	Goalkeeper	91.1	67,728	21

Note: the ranking considers only the 60 players who were selected for the analysis of Chapter 02. For details about what is included in 'international travel', please refer to 'Chapter 05 - Methodology'.  
Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

#### KEY INSIGHTS

- » The ranking of players with the highest international travel load (in terms of total travel time) includes several names that could be familiar from the ranking based on total match appearances over the same period (see Page 18). This implies a strong connection: **as international games are a significant source of match load for top players, their impact on travel load is clearly visible, as well.**
- » Three players from Mamelodi Sundowns who were included in the 60-player sample of our analysis are in the top 10 by travel load in both analysed seasons. The club made deep runs in several competitions, adding long-distance trips for them all-year round.
- » All four Wydad AC players of our sample are in the top 10 of the 2022/23 ranking. The Moroccan club reached the final of the CAF Champions League and played in the 2023 Arab Club Champions Cup that took place in Saudi Arabia in the summer, adding significant travel days to their players' schedule.
- » In total, seven different clubs from five countries have at least one representative player in at least one of the Top 10 rankings by travel load.



# 03

## LANDSCAPE OF AFRICAN FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS

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Despite some popular opinions to the contrary, being a professional footballer is not without its challenges as players have to contend with an increasingly hectic football calendar whilst being afforded less time for recovery. The African football landscape is not immune to these issues either; this chapter explores the most recent competition changes and how they affect the players.

# 03 / LANDSCAPE OF AFRICAN FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter delves into the competition landscape on the African continent by looking at its competitions at the domestic league, international club, and national team levels and then identifying the key trends and challenges faced by African players. At the domestic league level, the chapter compares all African **first division top tiers** by their size, the minimum number of matches played by their teams and their respective professional status. For African **club and national team competitions organised by CAF**, various recent and upcoming competition changes are explored along with their potential impact on players.

## DOMESTIC LEAGUE COMPETITIONS

The talent produced by the African continent is among the best in the world with global superstars such as Mohamed Salah, George Weah, Jay-Jay Okocha and Didier Drogba being only a small fraction of the top talents from the region that have wowed audiences around the world. Some of these talents, despite being born in Africa, moved to other continents at a young age and never played their domestic football in Africa. However, many other stars of today played in or are still an active part of African competitions that this section focuses on.

When undertaking the analysis in this section, it should be noted that all first divisions of the 54 African countries have been considered and where relevant, their accompanied second divisions. The data on each country's leagues mostly considers the most recent completed season (i.e. the 2023/24 or the 2023 season).

Size of African first division leagues

League size (no of teams)	Country	Number of countries
10	Djibouti, Eritrea, Mauritius, Seychelles	4
12	Central African Republic, Mozambique, Somalia, Cape Verde, South Sudan	5
14	Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Guinea, Liberia, Mauritania, Senegal, Chad, Tunisia, Gabon	9
15	Angola	1
16	Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, The Gambia, Togo, Uganda, Madagascar	20
17	Niger	1
18	Egypt, Kenya, Zambia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Sao Tome & Principe	7
19	Cameroon	1
20	Nigeria, DR Congo	2
21	Libya	1
24	Equatorial Guinea	1
30	Comoros	1
36	Benin	1

When it comes to the league size of every African country's first division, the most common structure involves 16 teams; 37% of leagues operate with this setup. The second most popular league size is 14 with 16% of African first tiers currently employing that size.

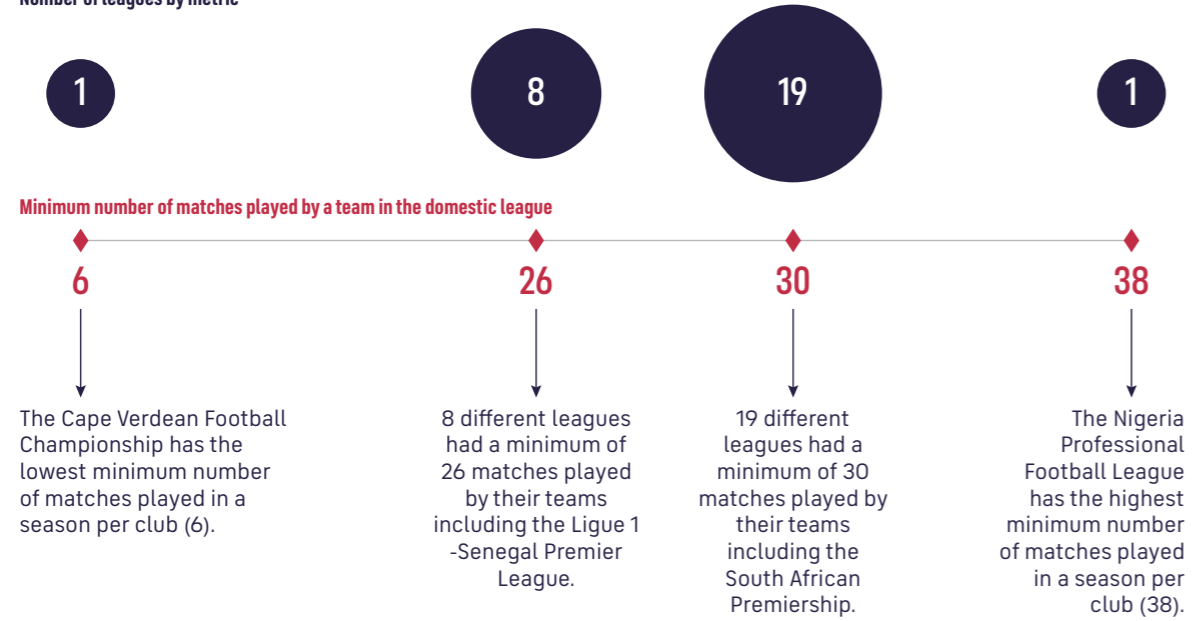
The first division league with the highest number of teams is the one of Benin with 36 teams. In the 2023/24 season, these teams were split into four groups of nine, with each team playing 16 regular season matches before teams were divided up into three groups for their 'play-off' phase. This format was altered in 2024/25 with the 36 teams now being split into two groups of 18 and teams playing a minimum of 17 matches.

Looking at the smallest league sizes, four leagues consist of only 10 teams: Djibouti, Eritrea, Mauritius and the Seychelles. The exact rationale for each of the country's league size is unknown but given that each of these nations has a smaller population than most other African nations, it would make sense for them to have smaller leagues, as well.



### Minimum number of matches played in a season per club in African first division leagues

Number of leagues by metric



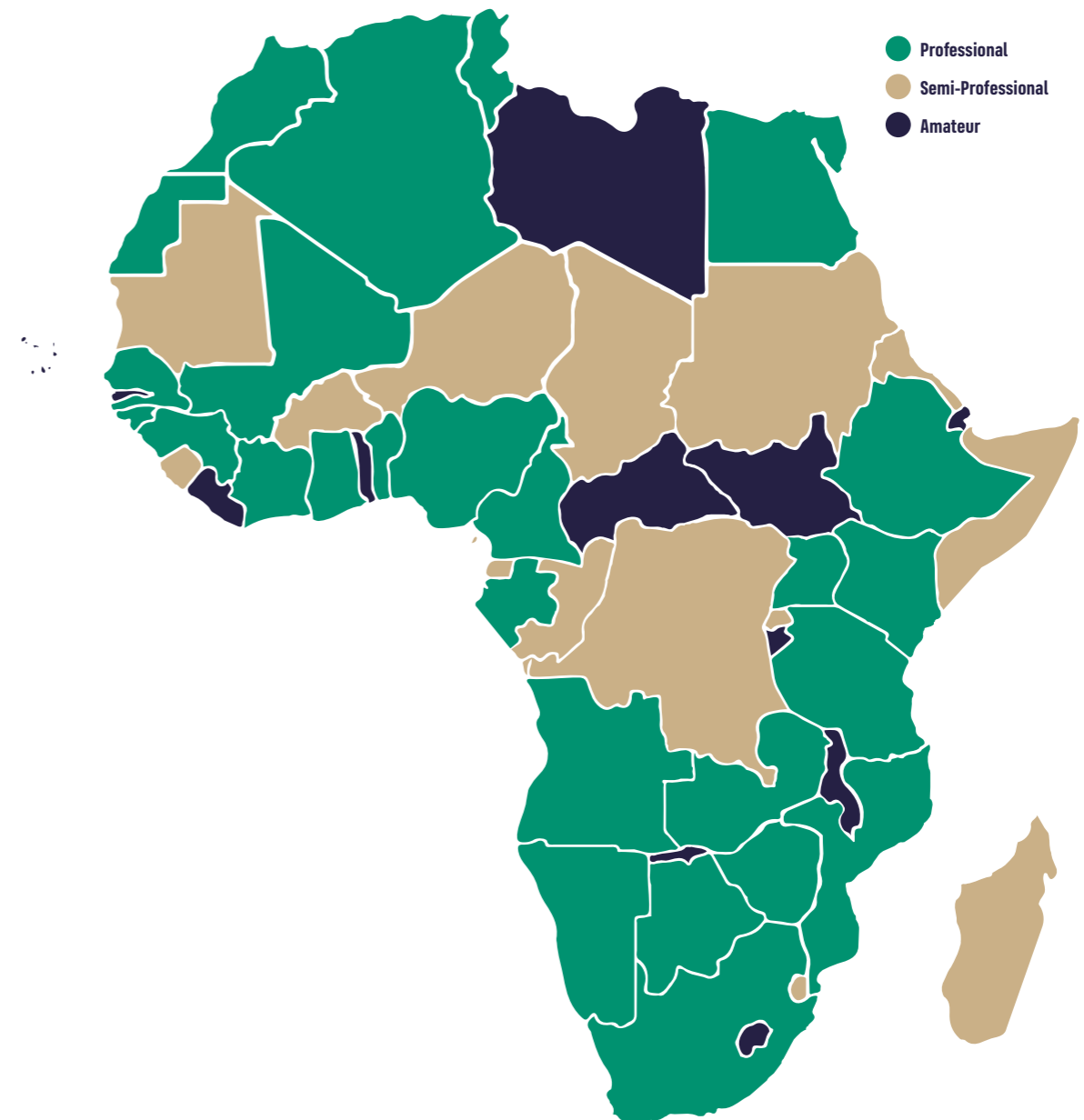
An important metric when comparing leagues is the minimum number of matches a team plays in a season. If a league has too few matches, then it may come across as underdeveloped as teams will have limited competition and could play too infrequently. On the other hand, if a league were to have many teams, then there is a higher chance of significant sporting imbalances to appear.

When looking at all 54 different African countries and their respective first division leagues, there is a significant disparity between the minimum number of matches played in a season per club. Looking at the higher end of the spectrum, the Nigeria Professional Football League (38) has the most matches played by its 20 top-flight professional club sides. This relatively high number could be attributed to the country's large population as the demand for football would be amplified by the nation's 230+ million residents, which is 100+ million more than any other African country.

At the opposite end, Cape Verde has the fewest with 6 matches played. The reason for such a small number is likely attributable to the nation's small population of around half a million as well as its archipelago-type geography in the North Atlantic Ocean and large distance from the African mainland which makes the ability to organise and play games challenging. Given these problems, it is not surprising that the Cape Verdean first division currently holds amateur status.

The most common minimum number of games played in a season by a team is 30, with 19 different African leagues falling into this category. This number, given the above analysis, is logical as the highest proportion of African leagues have 16 teams and thus after playing other teams twice, teams would have played 30 times each.

### African first division leagues by professional status



Perhaps unsurprisingly, the state of professionalism in African football compared to other continents is not always considered as best in class with numerous stories of poor scheduling, salaries not being paid and a lack of infrastructure at times being synonymous with the region. The above graphic illustrates the breakdown of African first division leagues by professional status and looking holistically, there are large sections of the continent where top divisions are not considered professional. **Only 48% of leagues have official professional status while 24% are considered amateur. Going one tier down, only 15% of countries on the continent have professional second division leagues at the moment.**




The proportion of professionalism among African leagues does vary between different regions. For example, 67% of North African first divisions are classified as professional: Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. Right behind them, is Southern Africa with a 60% share. Other regions fall quite some way behind; this disparity is likely caused by a multitude of factors including a region's relative rate of economic prosperity, the frequency of armed conflicts and the historical level of football development.

## INTERNATIONAL CLUB COMPETITIONS

When looking at competition reforms of African club international competitions, the level of change has not been as dramatic as in some of the other continents, as major club contests, such as the **CAF Champions League, CAF Confederation Cup and CAF Super Cup** all remained relatively unchanged. The most notable shake-up of African football in recent years is attributed to the creation of the **African Football League (AFL)** in 2023 which added a new batch of high-level matches for a small group of top clubs.

It should be noted that more regionally focused club international competitions, such as the Kagame Interclub Cup, are not included in this report's scope.


### CAF Champions League, CAF Confederation Cup and CAF Super Cup

Competition	Type	Last Competition	Next Competition			Δ in # of Max Possible Games
		Period	Period	# of Participating Teams	Max Possible Games Per Team	
 <b>CAF Champions League</b>	Club International	Nov 2023 – May 2024	Nov 2024 – May 2025	16	12	0
 <b>CAF Confederation Cup</b>	Club International	Nov 2023 – May 2024	Nov 2024 – May 2025	16	12	0
 <b>CAF Super Cup</b>	Club International	Sep 2023	Sep 2024	2	1	0

As mentioned previously, none of Champions League, Confederation Cup and Super Cup competitions has had any format changes in recent seasons. The “competition proper” of both the Champions League and the Confederation Cup still consists of 16 teams and participants play between 6 and 12 matches over the course of season, which provides them with crucial elite level experience.

From a scheduling and calendar perspective, it is notable that starting from the 2023/24 season both the Champions League and the Confederation Cup have brought their qualifying phases forward so that they could conclude in the beginning of October. This allowed them to launch the group stages at the end of November instead of February in the previous structure. It is thought that this major scheduling change was done to accommodate the new African Football League which ran for approx. three weeks in October-November in 2023. Crucially, even though the next edition of the AFL ultimately did not take place in the autumn of 2024, CAF still retained the new schedule for the 2024/25 season of the Champions League. This scheduling reshuffle also emphasises the increasingly congested nature of the African football calendar.

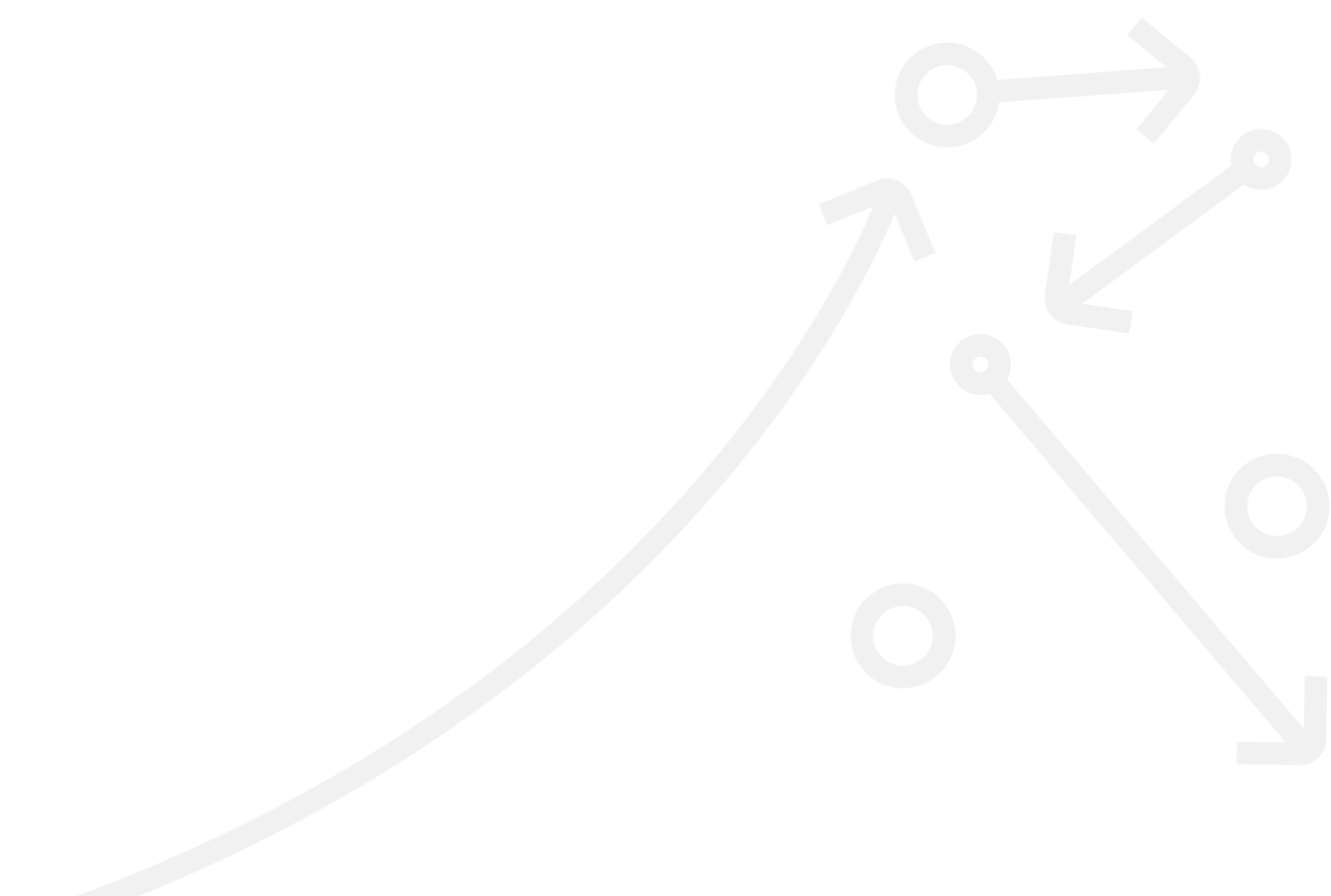
### African Football League

Competition	Type	Last Competition	Next Competition			Δ in # of Max Possible Games
		Period	Period	# of Participating Teams	Max Possible Games Per Team	
 <b>AFL</b>	Club International	Oct – Nov 2023	TBC	24	21	15

The African Football League (AFL), as mentioned earlier, is a relatively new competition that was launched on the 20th of October and lasted until the 12th of November 2023. The first edition consisted of eight teams in a two-legged knock-out tournament. It should be noted that the inaugural iteration of the AFL was actually intended to be much bigger: 24 participants would have played a maximum of 21 matches each in a season. Additionally, the expanded format was meant to include a relegation and promotion system and promised significant financial rewards for teams.

With the reduced version launched in 2023, it was announced that the following season's competition would increase in size to the originally planned, full-fledged 24-team format. However, multiple delays meant that the second AFL was pushed back to an undetermined time in 2025; there are no concrete dates in place as of the writing of this report.

The scheduling unclarity has created suspicion that the competition will not be able to generate sufficient audience appeal nor deliver on its initial promised revenues. Regardless, the AFL's likely continuation will have a workload impact on the participating players who will be required to play in and travel to another expanded competition in an ever more congested African football calendar.






## NATIONAL TEAM COMPETITIONS

From a national team perspective, notable changes are at play. The below section focuses on how structures and schedules have changed and what these updates mean in terms of player workload. The two African competitions that are addressed in this section are the **CAF Africa Cup of Nations ('AFCON')** and the **CAF African Nations Championship ('CHAN')**.

Smaller and more regionally-based national team contests, such as the COSAFA Cup (an annual tournament for teams from Southern Africa) are outside the scope of this report.

### CAF Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON)

Competition	Type	Last Competition	Next Competition			Δ in # of Max Possible Games
		Period	Period	# of Participating Teams	Max Possible Games Per Team	
	National Team	Jan - Feb 2024	Dec 2025 - Jan 2026	24	7	0


AFCON is the premier international competition on the continent with the last edition taking place in the Cote d'Ivoire in 2024. The competition had 24 participating teams in the almost month-long competition and 52 matches were played with each team playing between three and seven games each.

AFCON, which typically takes place every two years, has not changed its format recently and there are no plans in place for adjustments for the 2025 edition either. However, the timing and scheduling of the tournament has been a major talking point in African football for a while.

Due to a January-February timing, European football stakeholders often complain that they have to release important players during the middle of the club season to take part in the AFCON. To avoid this conflict, the 2019 tournament was initially planned to be moved to the European summer in June-July and the organisers' intention was to do the same in the following editions, too. However, CAF later decided to revert to the "traditional" timing both in 2021 and 2023 because of unfavourable climate concerns. The upcoming 2025 edition also cannot be held in June-July, but this time mainly due to FIFA's introduction of the revamped Club World Cup that appropriates that period in the match calendar.

In order to showcase the impact of the most recent and upcoming AFCON tournaments on African players based in Europe, an in-depth case study with specific player examples is included on Pages 34-35.

### CAF African Nations Championship

Competition	Type	Last Competition	Next Competition			Δ in # of Max Possible Games
		Period	Period	# of Participating Teams	Max Possible Games Per Team	
	National Team	Jan - Feb 2023	Feb 2025	19	TBC	TBC

One tournament that has changed its format in recent editions is the CHAN, which is widely considered as the secondary African national team competition. However, a unique trait of the CHAN is that only players playing their football in domestic African leagues can participate, giving it a unique environment and flavour.

The last completed edition of the competition took place in Algeria and spanned from the middle of January to the beginning of February 2023. Unlike the 2020 edition which had 16 teams, the 2022 CHAN had 17 participants playing a minimum of two and a maximum of six matches each.

The 2024 iteration of the competition (due to be played in early 2025) is set to feature another expansion as 19 teams will feature in the finals. This two-team increase is partially due to the fact that no fewer than three host nations will organise the tournament (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda). Coincidentally, the same three nations that will act as host countries for the 2027 AFCON, as well.

Although the number of teams in the 2024 CHAN has been announced by CAF, the exact format of the competition structure and number of matches each of the teams could end up playing has not been confirmed yet. Interestingly, a detail that has been revealed by CAF is that the prize money pot will be 60% higher than in past competitions (growing to USD 2 million in total).

Much like AFCON, several delays have occurred lately with regards to CHAN: the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 FIFA World Cup unusually taking place in November-December both led to rescheduling.



## CASE STUDY

### AFCON'S IMPACT ON EUROPE-BASED AFRICAN PLAYERS

As the majority of Africa's elite players compete in European leagues, the timing of the AFCON within the European football calendar presents significant challenges. As the calendar becomes increasingly congested, the time allocated for in-season breaks, typically in late December or early January, overlaps with AFCON, intensifying workload demands of African players in tournament years. Players face extensive travel demands to join their national teams and return to their clubs, heightening the strain of an already packed season. Transitioning from club duties to national team responsibilities requires players to quickly adapt to different training regimens, coaching styles, and team dynamics, often within facilities that lack the resources of their European clubs. Furthermore, the mental challenges associated with representing their country on a continental stage cannot be overlooked. The format of the tournament, which often involves limited rest and recovery between matches, adds to the physical and emotional demands placed on players. Following the conclusion of the tournament, players typically have a limited window for rest and recovery due to the tight schedule of most domestic competitions which will be only exacerbated by the revamped UEFA club competition schedule.

The following case study explores the demands of overlapping football competitions through the examples of players participating in the most recent (2023) and upcoming AFCON tournaments. Although the case study focuses on a select small group, the highlighted challenges affect a much larger segment of Europe-based African players in reality.

#### 2023 AFCON

As it was highlighted earlier, scheduling conflicts remained for the 2023 edition due to summer weather concerns in the host country. As such the tournament was held from 13 January 2024 until 11 February 2024.

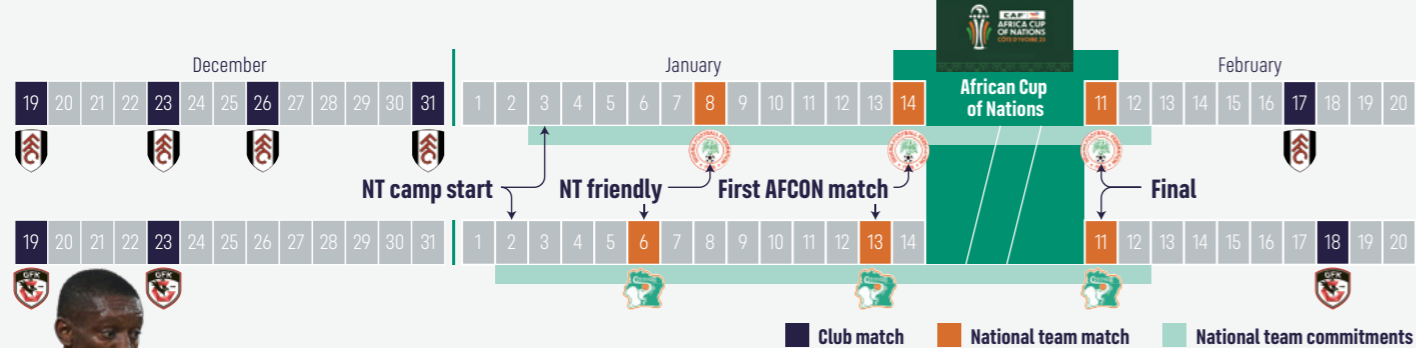
**More than 64% of the participating players played their club football in European leagues at the time of the tournament, which highlights the interconnectedness of African and European football.** Among these players, the following analysis presents the demanding calendars of two, one from each AFCON 2023 finalist team: Calvin Bassey (Nigeria) and Max Gradel (Cote d'Ivoire). Their examples highlight the condensed timeline for rest and recovery when trying to balance national team and club commitments in an AFCON season.

##### CALVIN BASSEY - NIGERIA

Calvin Bassey closed 2023 with a victory over Arsenal FC in the English Premier League with his club side, Fulham FC. After a few days, he joined Nigeria's camp in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates), where they played a friendly game against Guinea six days ahead of their first AFCON 2023 group stage match. While Bassey was away for the tournament, his club played four league matches and four domestic cup games in his absence. He returned to club action, playing his first match just six days after the AFCON final.



#### Period before and after AFCON 2023



##### MAX GRADEL - COTE D'IVOIRE

Max Gradel's final match of 2023 was on 23 December for Gaziantep in the Turkish first division. At the start of the new year, he joined the Ivory Coast national team, traveling from Abidjan to San Pedro, where they played a friendly in preparation for the tournament. **While on national team duty, Gradel missed two domestic cup matches and eight league games of his club. He played his first club match seven days after the AFCON final.**



#### 2025 AFCON

The 2025 AFCON will also be affected by another major competition change outside of Africa: two more matchdays have been added to the league phases of the UEFA Champions League and Europa League in late January from the 2024/25 season onwards. As several African players are important members of top European teams, it was decided by CAF to move AFCON forward by a few weeks so that those players can return in time to their clubs post-tournament. This means that the 2025 edition will take place in Morocco between the 21 December 2025 and 18 January 2026. This is yet another example of the timing of African competitions influenced by external factors. From a workload perspective, this scheduling is problematic as players who progress far in AFCON have limited time before and after the competition.

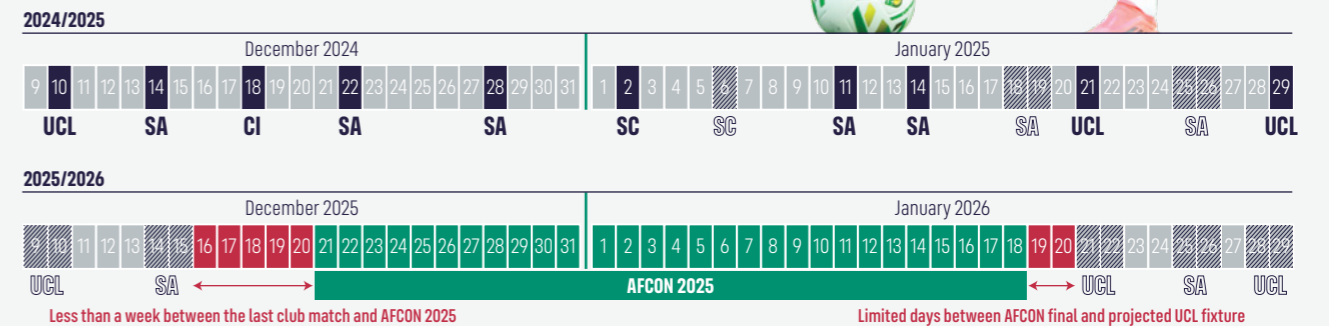
##### ADEMOLA LOOKMAN - NIGERIA

Take the case of Ademola Lookman, a regular starter for both his club side Atalanta BC in Italy and the Nigerian national team. To illustrate the potential challenges he faces, the calendar visual outlines his potential 2024/25 schedule for December and January. His 2025/26 calendar for the same months, including the 2025 AFCON, is also provided for comparison.

Based on his 2024/25 calendar, the months of December and January are going to be packed with both club domestic and club international commitments. December alone includes four Italian Serie A matches, a UEFA Champions League fixture, and Atalanta's Coppa Italia debut in the Round of 16. In January, the player is set to travel to Saudi Arabia for the Supercoppa Italiana (1 or 2 games if they reach the final), marking Atalanta's first appearance in the competition, alongside four Serie A matchdays and two group-stage matches in the UEFA Champions League.



#### Ademola Lookman's actual (2024/25) and projected (2025/26) calendars in December and January



SA - Italian Serie A CI - Italian Coppa Italia SC - Italian Supercoppa Italiana UCL - UEFA Champions League

In the 2025/26 season, during the same period, Lookman is set to participate in AFCON 2025 with Nigeria. Considering the congested European match calendar, the player would likely only have approximately one week between his last club match and the start of AFCON 2025. Additionally, similar to the 2023 edition, Nigeria might organise a friendly match ahead of AFCON, adding yet another fixture to his schedule right before the tournament kicks off. What's even more striking is the time between the final of the AFCON (a match in which Nigeria could feature), and Lookman's next club match. Given what we know today, the player's next UEFA Champions League game with his club in late January could take place mere days after the AFCON final.

**The lack of rest time between competitions and the increased number of international travel days places a high workload burden on Europe-based African professionals; the expansion of UEFA club competitions will likely only exacerbate the issue and the conflict between various stakeholders.**

# 04

## MATCH CALENDAR ANALYSIS AND PROJECTION

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The seemingly endless expansion of the calendar in both Africa and internationally continues to pile workload demands on top African players. They are being tasked to satisfy a longer and more saturated football calendar with reduced rest times. This is even before considering the unique nature of African football where some players face vast travel requirements, harsh weather conditions and - at times - minimal financial reward in return for their efforts. What can we expect in the upcoming seasons?



# 04 MATCH CALENDAR ANALYSIS AND PROJECTION

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter takes a deep dive into the number of matches that selected top-level African players have been expected to fulfil over the last two seasons (2022/23 and 2023/24) and it also aims to project how their match load could evolve over the next three seasons (2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27). The upcoming period will be affected by various format changes and expansions of competitions, as described by Chapter 03.

To demonstrate this impact from with a holistic perspective, three African nationals with distinct competition mix profiles were selected. Only two of them are employed by an African club, while the third one is a key player for a top European side. The inclusion of the latter was important so that we could benchmark the other two players' match load evolution with someone outside of Africa who is subjected to other types of competition changes.

## THE THREE SELECTED PLAYERS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

PLAYER 1



TEBOHO MOKOENA



A top Africa-based player with international match commitments for both club and country

PLAYER 2

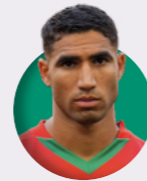


YUSUF MAART



An Africa-based player with only domestic match commitments and without national team football

PLAYER 3



ACHRAF HAKIMI



A top African national playing in Europe with international match commitments for both club and country

In undertaking the match load assessment of past and projected seasons for each of these African players, a series of general assumptions had to be applied. Namely, it was assumed that 1) none of them will have a significant injury in the projected seasons that would limit their availability, 2) all three will continue to serve as regular starters for their current club sides, and 3) they will all stay at their current club. Player-specific assumptions are explained in later sections.

Finally, it is worth keeping in mind that the general trends explored in this chapter are not unique to the selected players. Others working in similar environments are all likely to face the same issues, regardless of the exact identity of their clubs or national teams. In this sense, the three players can be considered as representatives of larger segments of professional footballers and their cases allude to wider issues at play.

## MATCH LOAD PROJECTION

Player 1 - Teboho Mokoena (Mamelodi Sundowns and South African national team)

	Actual Appearances		Projected Appearances		
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
<b>Club</b>					
Betway Premiership	24	17	24	24	24
Nedbank Cup	1	2	4	4	4
MTN8	3	4	3	3	3
Carling Knockout Cup	-	-	1	1	1
CAF - Champions League	10	9	10	10	10
CAF - Confederation Cup	-	-	-	-	-
CAF - Super Cup	-	-	-	-	-
African Football League	-	5	-	14	14
FIFA Intercontinental Cup	-	-	-	-	-
FIFA Club World Cup	-	-	4	-	-
<b>Total Club Matches</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>National Team</b>					
Africa Cup of Nations Qualifiers	3	-	4	-	4
Africa Cup of Nations	-	7	-	5	5
FIFA World Cup Qualifiers	-	4	1	2	2
FIFA World Cup	-	-	-	3	-
Olympics	-	-	-	-	-
International Friendlies	4	3	2	5	-
<b>Total National Team Matches</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Total Matches</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>67</b>

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

### Assumptions

- Mamelodi Sundowns will qualify for the CAF Champions League in each projected season. However, they will not compete in the CAF Super Cup or the FIFA Intercontinental Cup over the projected period.
- Mamelodi Sundowns will make the final of all domestic cup competitions e.g., Nedbank Cup, MTN8 and Carling Knockout Cup. However, it is assumed that the player will play in only one match of the Carling Knockout Cup as the competition isn't always prioritised and sometimes teams play their reserve players.
- Mamelodi Sundowns will make it to the first knock-out round and then progress no further in the African Football League (AFL) with the player playing in all but two games. It is assumed that the next AFL will recommence in the 2025/26 season.
- Mamelodi Sundowns will make it to the Round of 16 in the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup.
- South Africa will qualify for the FIFA World Cup as one of the nine first-place teams from qualifying. At the tournament, they will not progress beyond the group stages.
- The timing of the 2027 AFCON qualifying phase has not been released yet, but it was assumed that six qualifying games will be played during the 2026/27 season.
- The South African national team will reach at least the quarterfinals of the next two AFCONs with the player appearing most matches. The player will play in 80% of available international friendlies over the period.

### KEY INSIGHTS

- Mokoena's jump in total projected appearances in the 2025/26 and 2026/27 seasons (a 34% and 24% increase, respectively, compared to 2024/25) is heavily impacted by the expansion of the AFL, FIFA Club World Cup, FIFA World Cup competitions.
- The potential expansion of the AFL will add a significant workload burden for Mokoena in the 2025/26 and 2026/27 seasons as the competition is projected to make up 25% of the player's total expected club appearances in each season.
- The upcoming two editions AFCON in 2025/26 and 2026/27 will add increased congestion to an already hectic calendar with players potentially being expected to play multiple major national team competition in the same season. For example, the 2025 AFCON and the 2026 FIFA World Cup will both take place in the player's 2025/26 season.



**Player 2 - Yusuf Maart (Kaizer Chiefs)**

	Actual Appearances		Projected Appearances		
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Competition	Appearances	Appearances	Projected Appearances	Projected Appearances	Projected Appearances
Betway Premiership	28	23	26	26	26
Nedbank Cup	4	1	3	3	3
MTN8	2	3	-	1	1
Carling Knockout Cup	-	1	2	2	2
CAF - Champions League	-	-	-	-	-
CAF - Confederation Cup	-	-	-	-	-
CAF - Super Cup	-	-	-	-	-
African Football League	-	-	-	-	-
FIFA Intercontinental Cup	-	-	-	-	-
FIFA Club World Cup	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Club Matches</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>
Africa Cup of Nations Qualifiers	-	-	-	-	-
Africa Cup of Nations	-	-	-	-	-
FIFA World Cup Qualifiers	-	-	-	-	-
FIFA World Cup	-	-	-	-	-
Olympics	-	-	-	-	-
International Friendlies	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total National Team Matches</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total Matches</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

**Assumptions**

1. The player is expected to appear in a similar volume of domestic club matches as he did in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 seasons.
2. Kaizer Chiefs will qualify for the MTN8 cup in 2025/26 and 2026/27 (by finishing in the top eight of the domestic league). However, it is assumed that the club will not qualify for continental tournaments, thus limiting the player's access to competitions.
3. Kaizer Chiefs will reach but fail to progress beyond the quarter-finals of each of the three domestic cup competitions e.g. Nedbank Cup, MTN8 and Carling Knockout Cup.
4. The player will not play for his senior national team in the projected period. His last appearance for the senior South African national team was in June 2022.

**KEY INSIGHTS**

- » As a player who plays for a club side that is not projected to qualify for continental competition in upcoming seasons, Maart's club appearances are expected to remain relatively unchanged in future seasons, as well.
- » Additionally, as he is not anticipated to feature for the South African national team in the next few seasons, his overall appearances across club and national team will remain relatively constant compared to his compatriot, Mokoena, whose total appearances are set to noticeably increase.

**Player 3 - Achraf Hakimi (Paris Saint-Germain FC and Moroccan national team)**

	Actual Appearances		Projected Appearances		
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Competition	Appearances	Appearances	Projected Appearances	Projected Appearances	Projected Appearances
Ligue 1	28	25	33	30	33
Coupe de France	2	3	4	2	4
Trophée des Champions	1	1	1	1	1
UEFA Champions League	8	11	11	11	11
UEFA Super Cup	-	-	-	-	-
FIFA Intercontinental Cup	-	-	-	-	-
FIFA Club World Cup	-	-	6	-	-
<b>Total Club Matches</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>49</b>
FIFA Arab Cup	-	-	-	-	-
Africa Cup of Nations Qualifiers	1	1	5	-	5
Africa Cup of Nations	-	4	-	6	6
FIFA World Cup Qualifiers	-	3	1	2	3
FIFA World Cup	7	-	-	6	-
Olympics	-	6	-	-	-
International Friendlies	5	5	2	5	-
<b>Total National Team Matches</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Total Matches</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>63</b>

Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

**Assumptions**

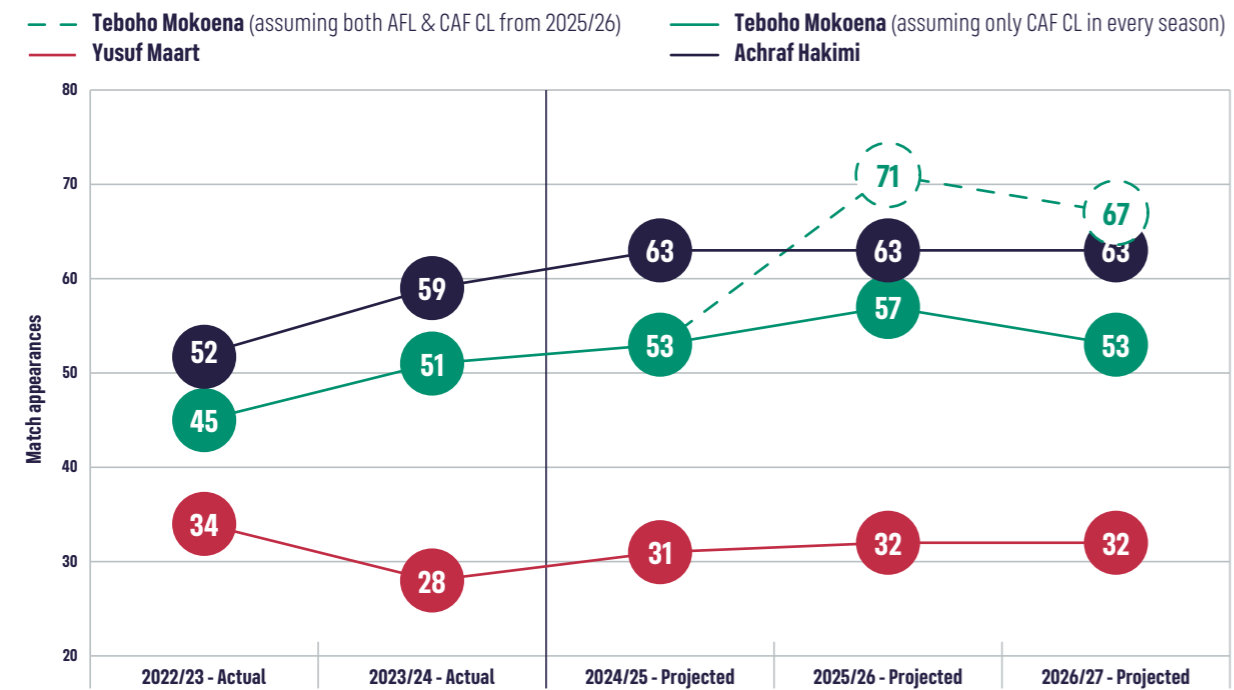
1. The players' league and domestic cup appearances will generally reflect the average of the last two completed seasons. However, both league and domestic cup projected appearances have been slightly increased under the assumption that the player won't have an injury like he had in 2023/24.
2. PSG will make the quarter-finals of the UCL after finishing in the top eight places of the league phase. Therefore, PSG will play 12 UCL games in each of the projected seasons. The player will play in all games except one.
3. PSG will reach the semi-final of the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup with the player involved in all matches.
4. PSG will not qualify for the UEFA Super Cup or the FIFA Intercontinental Cup over the analysed period.
5. The timing of the 2027 AFCON qualifying phase has not been released yet, but it was assumed that six qualifying games will be played during the 2026/27 season.
6. Morocco will make the final of AFCON with the player playing all but one match.
7. Morocco will finish top of their World Cup qualifying group and thus will advance directly to the 2026 FIFA World Cup. It is assumed that the team will make it to the quarter-finals of the tournament with Hakimi involved in all of their matches.
8. The player will not participate in the 2025 FIFA Arab Cup.

**KEY INSIGHTS**

- » Interestingly, although Hakimi is estimated to record 63 appearances in each of the three projected seasons, the competition mix is markedly different in them. For example, while club matches in 2024/25 could make up 87% of his match load (mainly due to the FIFA Club World Cup in the summer), the share could drop to 69% in the following season due to the FIFA World Cup and the AFCON where he would likely participate as a key member of the Moroccan national team.
- » Little over half of his projected national team appearances over the period is expected to come in CAF-organised competitions over the projected period. Other organisers, mainly FIFA, take up the remaining share.
- » **The presence of the FIFA Club World Cup in 2024/25, the FIFA World Cup in 2025/26 and AFCON in 2026/27 will mean that Hakimi is unlikely to have in the near future a summer break period without a major club or national team competition taking place.**



**SUMMARY - Actual and projected appearances of the selected players**



Source: Football Benchmark research and analysis

This section summarizes the match load projections of all three selected players in one place. Up top, it must be mentioned that in the case of Mokoena, there is debate as to whether the proposed expansion of the AFL will mean the cancellation of the CAF Champions League. Although not confirmed, this is something that has been rumoured as a possibility. **To show the workload impact of the introduction of the AFL to the match calendar, two scenarios were developed for Mokoena:** one in which the AFL is not launched, thus leaving the Champions League as the undisputed top international club competition on the continent, and one in which the two competitions operate in tandem from 2025/26 onwards.

It should be noted that in the 2023/24 season the two tournaments were already in place at the same time, although in its first edition the AFL meant a maximum of six more matches in the calendar for each participating team. Nevertheless, it is rare that a confederation requires its top clubs to take part in multiple international tournaments in the same season.

The results of our analysis show that total appearances of the two players with heavy international match commitments (Mokoena and Hakimi) are projected to increase in future seasons, whereas Yusuf Maart's is expected to remain relatively constant. This is mainly due to both Mokoena and Hakimi being expected to play in new and expanded football competitions in upcoming seasons: the African Football League (AFL), FIFA Club World Cup, FIFA World Cup and the UEFA Champions League adding new games to the football calendar. As a player who is not projected to compete in international tournament for either their club or national team, Maart will not face the same increase.

When comparing the starting season of the analysis (2022/23) with the projected season with the highest match load, Mokoena's total appearances could increase by 26, which would be an extremely high, 58% increase. This considers the scenario in which the AFL and the CAF Champions League both remain part of the calendar in 2025/26. Hakimi's total could realistically grow by 13, while Maart's match load could even potentially decrease by two matches by the end of the projected period.

**It is clear that certain top professional players in Africa will be faced with match calendar challenges similar to those that are already heavily discussed in relation to European football. At the same time, the playing time opportunity gap between African footballers with and without international matches will widen.**





# 05

## METHODOLOGY

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

## 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

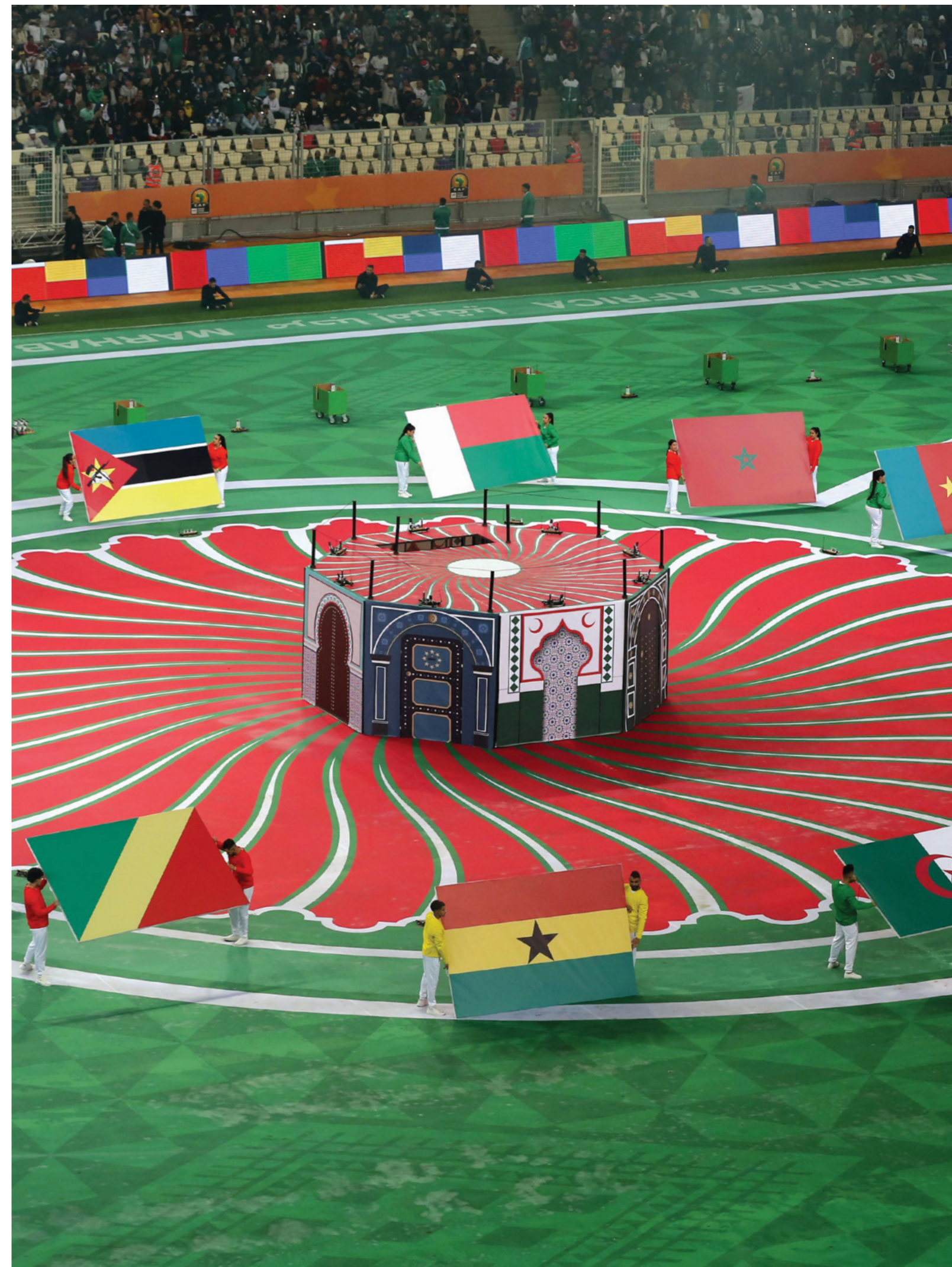
The Men's Player Workload Monitoring Platform provides transparent and regular player workload updates to the football industry, covering a global sample of men's professional footballers.

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 cutting-edge 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.







## TERMS & DEFINITIONS


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


### WORKLOAD STANDARDS


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


### MATCH LOAD


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

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


 **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.

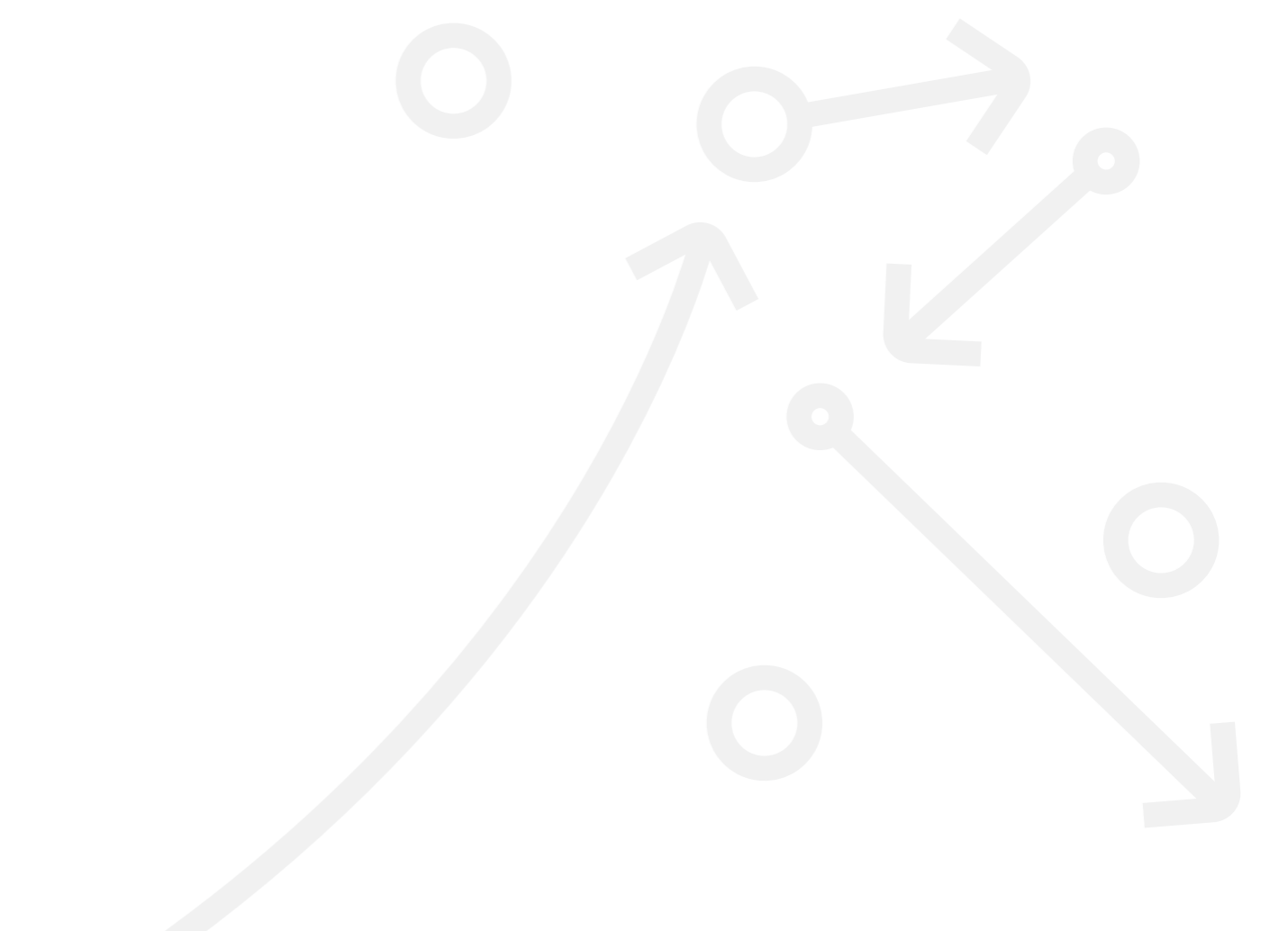
### TRAVEL LOAD (international only)

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

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

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

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





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