

**ELITE MEN'S FOOTBALL MATCH
CALENDAR AND PLAYER WORKLOAD
HISTORICAL TRENDS AND CURRENT LANDSCAPE**

AUGUST 2024

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METHODOLOGY

Through a series of case studies and deep dives, this report aims at offering additional insights into the topics of the men's football match calendar and player workload. In doing so, it complements the three publications (included in the annex at the end of this document) already produced by the CIES Football Observatory on the subject. With the aim of illustrating the current scenario at elite level, the analyses are for the most part regarding the so-called big-5 European footballing countries (England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain).

All of the figures and statistics included in this report are the result of CIES Sports Intelligence analyses based on internal databases or publicly available sources. To ensure a consistent approach across the whole timeline considered in the specific section of the report, statistics on players' minutes on the pitch are the outcome of CIES Sports Intelligence elaborations from Transfermarkt data. For each season, the total of minutes played refers to appearances between the 1st of August and the 31st of July. Data does not take into account club friendlies nor added time. In this case, the sample of the analyses is made of all players competing at top division level in Belgium, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

The kilometers travelled by clubs to participate in friendly matches outside of Europe were calculated as straight-line distance between locations. Unless otherwise obvious, it was assumed that clubs had travelled directly between the locations of two consecutive matches. Non-competitive matches between two Premier League clubs were counted as two games for the purposes of illustrating the league-wide aggregate number of friendlies (that is because, essentially, both clubs travelled to the location of the match and 'played' one game).

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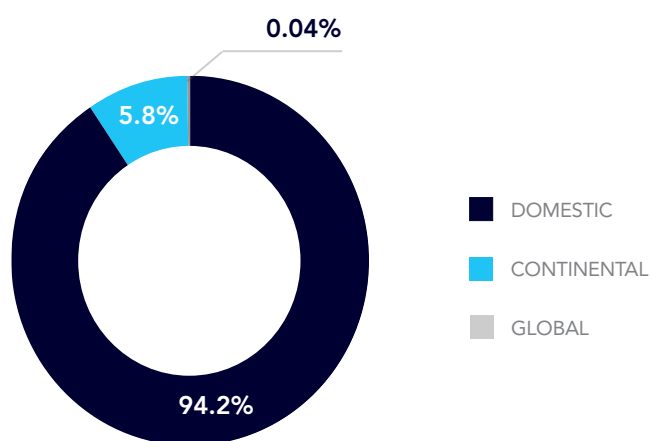
TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE MEN'S FOOTBALL MATCH CALENDAR AT ELITE LEVEL: FACTS AND FIGURES	4
THE MEN'S FOOTBALL MATCH CALENDAR AT ELITE LEVEL: PLAYER WORKLOAD	15
ANNEX	
REPORT 1: NUMBER OF MATCHES AND WEIGHT OF ORGANISERS	26
REPORT 2: MATCH SCHEDULE PER CLUB - A GLOBAL ANALYSIS	34
REPORT 3: PLAYERS MOST IN-DEMAND: CURRENT STATS AND TRENDS	43

THE MEN'S FOOTBALL MATCH CALENDAR AT ELITE LEVEL - FACTS & FIGURES

The structure of the elite men's professional football calendar and the schedule according to which official competitions are organised upon it are amongst the most debated subjects in world football. Whilst the topic may be approached from a number of different perspectives, our analyses starts by looking at how, and to which extent, the current elite football calendar is occupied by the staging of official matches. In its second publication on the subject (the full report is included in the annex at the end of this document), the CIES Football Observatory highlighted the role of domestic bodies (i.e. leagues or national associations) as main competitions organisers. As detailed in Figure 1, games of domestic nature accounted for 94.2% of the total 330,748 matches considered in the study.

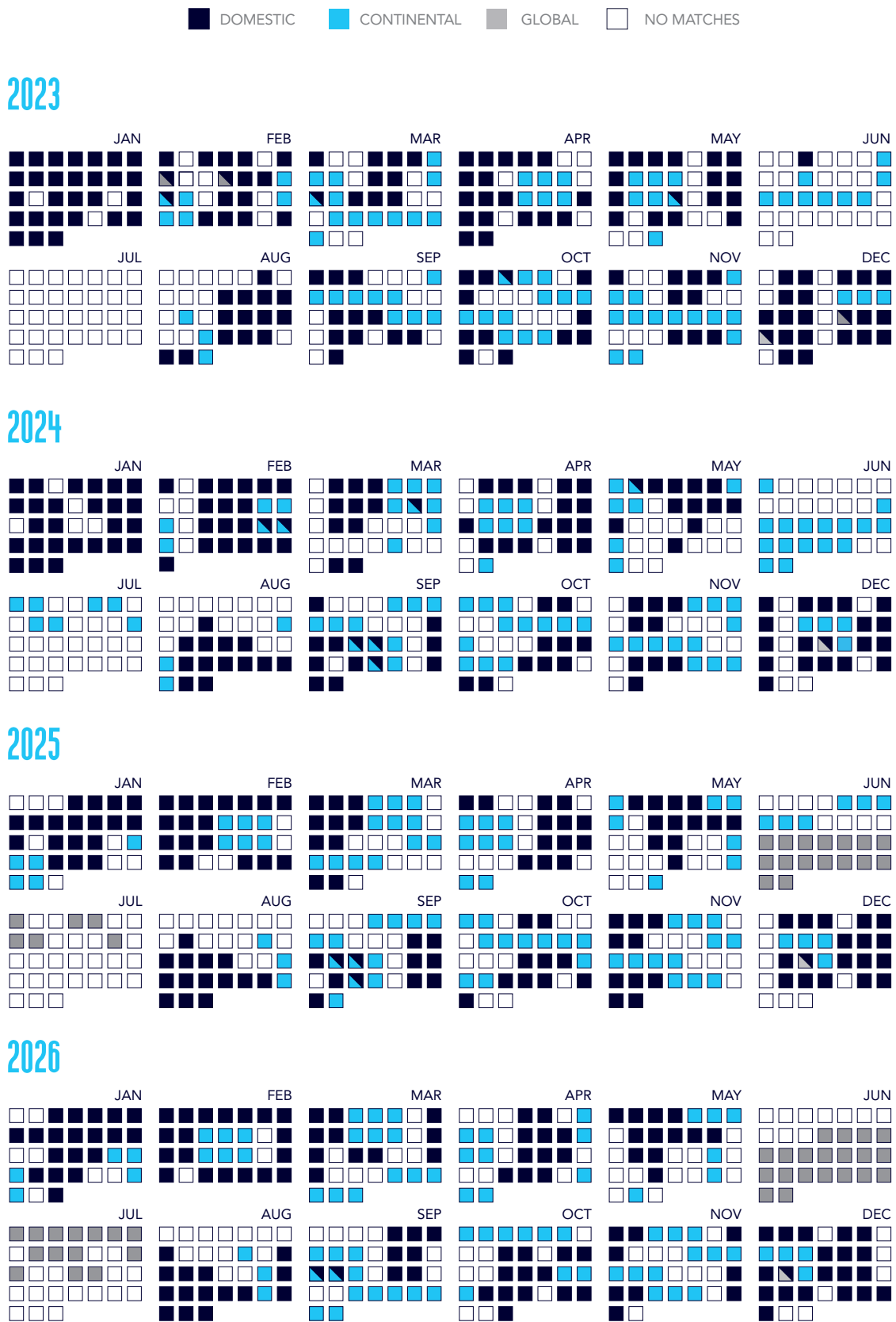
Figure 1: Distribution of football matches at global level, by geographical scope of the event (total sample of 330,748 official matches - Seasons 2012/2013 to 2023/2024)*



* The sample includes all official matches played by clubs from a selection of 40 top-tier leagues from around the world. The analysis is a readaption of Figure 8 from the second CIES Football Observatory's publication on the Match Calendar and Player Workload. The full study is included in the annex at the end of this report.

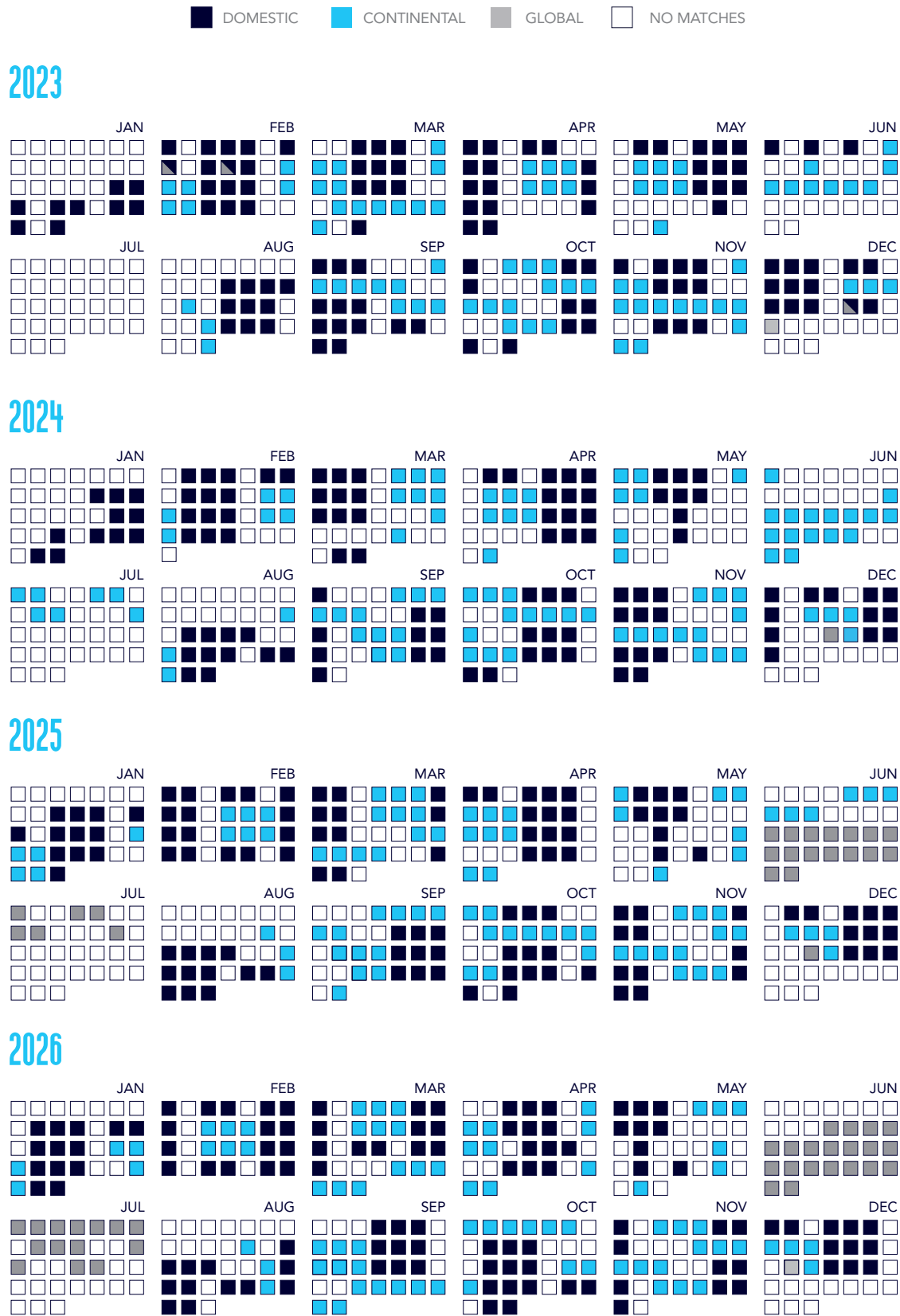
Here, we provide an indication into how this scenario translates in terms of days, arguably a crucial element within any calendar discussion. To illustrate the scenario at the top of the pyramid, the analysis is seen through the lens of the big-5 European leagues and, amongst them, two cases more specifically - one of a country with a 20-team top-tier division and two domestic cup competitions (England) and the other related to a domestic football context comprising of 18 clubs in the top division and only one domestic cup tournament (Germany). By focusing on the 2023-2026 four-year cycle, the exercise takes into account the most notable competition format changes set to become effective in the upcoming years. Amongst others, these include the expansion of the UEFA club competitions that will be implemented as of the 2024/2025 season, the introduction of a revamped FIFA Club World Cup in the summer of 2025 and the expansion of the FIFA World Cup™ to 48 teams.

Figure 2: Four-year calendar by estimated occurrence and geographical scope of official matches potentially involving a club from the English Premier League or a European senior national team



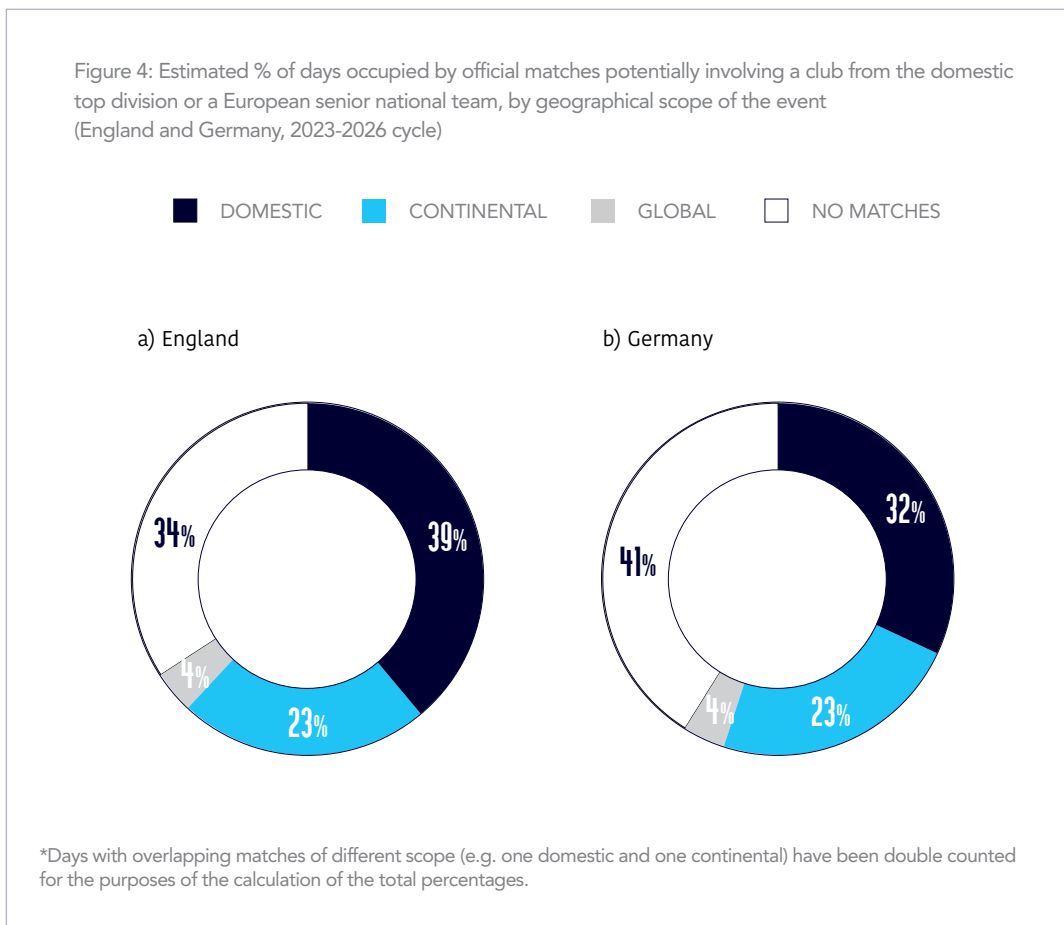
All data related to events that have not taken place as of July 2024 has been estimated on the basis of the best available information.

Figure 3: Four-year calendar by estimated occurrence and scope of official matches potentially involving a club from the German Bundesliga or a European senior national team



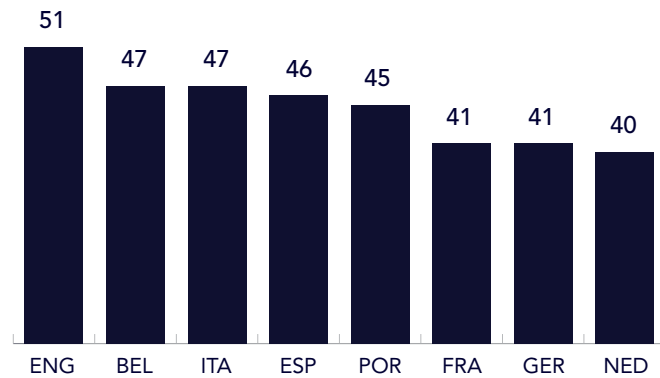
All data related to events that have not taken place as of July 2024 has been estimated on the basis of the best available information.

As expected, the analysis confirms that, in both cases, the domestic component of the football calendar is by far the prevalent one. Notwithstanding this, however, it also highlights the differences that may exist between countries in terms of the total number of days occupied by matches organised by national top-tier leagues and associations. In the case of England and Germany, for example, this amounts to an estimated total of 106 days (the equivalent of approximately three months and a half) over the four-year period. Interestingly, Figure 4 also points at the different degree of 'calendar occupation' between matches of continental nature (accounting for slightly more than a fifth of the total days over the four-year period) and those related to global competitions instead (occurring on a total of 60 days within the four-year cycle).



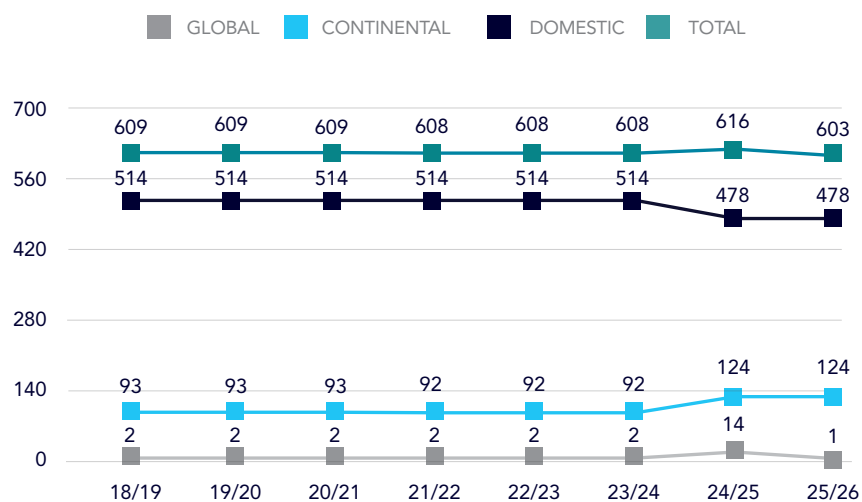
These figures underline the fact that, notwithstanding the structure of the international football calendar, a major element in assessing the current organisation of elite football is represented by the number and format of club competitions taking place at domestic level. Following France's abolishment of the *Coupe de la Ligue* since 2020/2021 and reduction of the *Ligue 1* to 18 teams starting from the 2023/2024 season, England is currently the only country amongst the top eight in the UEFA ranking still counting with 20 teams in the top-tier division and two domestic cup competitions. As result, Premier League clubs face the highest potential maximum number of domestic matches over the course of a single season.

Figure 5: Maximum number of domestic matches potentially played by a top division club, 2024/2025 season



It should be pointed out that the above already factors in the English Football Association's decision to scrap replays in the FA Cup starting from the 2024/2025 season. On a theoretical basis, that measure reduces the potential aggregate maximum number of matches involving a Premier League club over a four-year cycle. That is the case even taking into account the increase in size of European club competitions from 2024/2025 (+32 potential matches on a yearly basis) and the introduction of the new quadrennial FIFA Club World Cup (+9 potential matches over four years, considering the reduction of the annual event - now known as *Coupe Inter-continentrale de la FIFA* - from the previous potential two-game format to a single final).

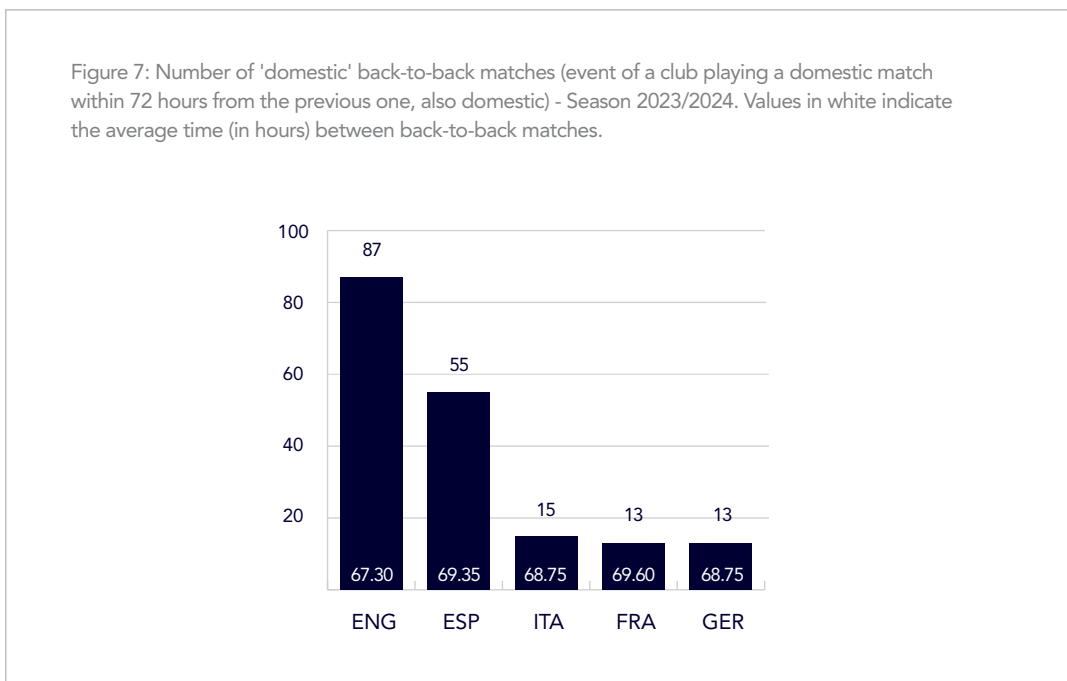
Figure 6: Maximum number of official matches potentially involving a club from the English Premier League, by season and geographical scope of the event



* The analysis does not take into account temporary competition format changes adopted in the post-pandemic period.

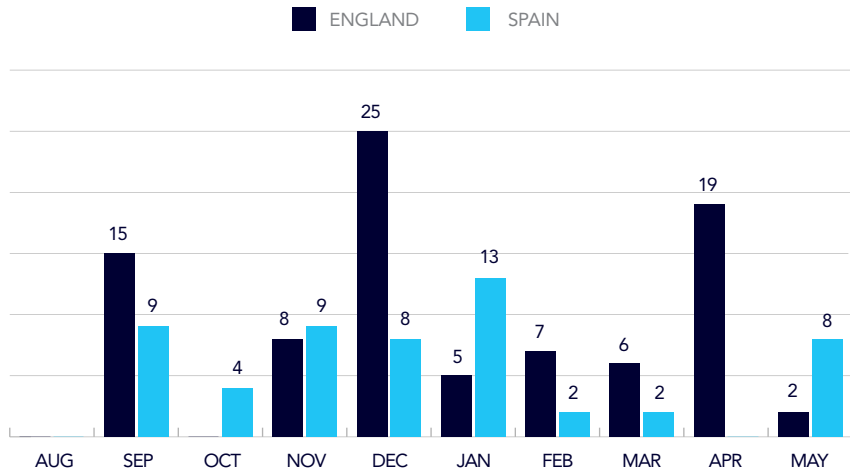
The scenario described with regards to the structure of domestic competitions at the top of European football is reflected also by the challenges organisers face in terms of competition scheduling. As illustrated in the big-5 European footballing countries analysis below, England was home to the highest number of 'domestic' back-to-back matches (event of a club playing a domestic match within 72 hours from the previous one, also domestic) over the course of the 2023/2024 season.

In addition, England also topped the ranking in terms of the shortest average time between back-to-back matches - with a value of 67.3 hours. The shortest turnaround times between matches came in November - when Manchester United played against Fulham in the Premier League 64 hours and 15 minutes after the previous League Cup game against Newcastle United - and in April, when Manchester City played two Premier League matches against Aston Villa and Crystal Palace also at a distance of 64 hours and 15 minutes between one another.



As expected, the crowded December schedule typical of English football was the main contributor to the total of back-to-back matches involving clubs from the Premier League, followed by busy spells also in April and September. By way of comparison, the scenario in Spain - the second country by number of matches held at short distance between one another - was more equally spread during the course of the season.

Figure 8: Number of 'domestic' back-to-back matches by month of occurrence



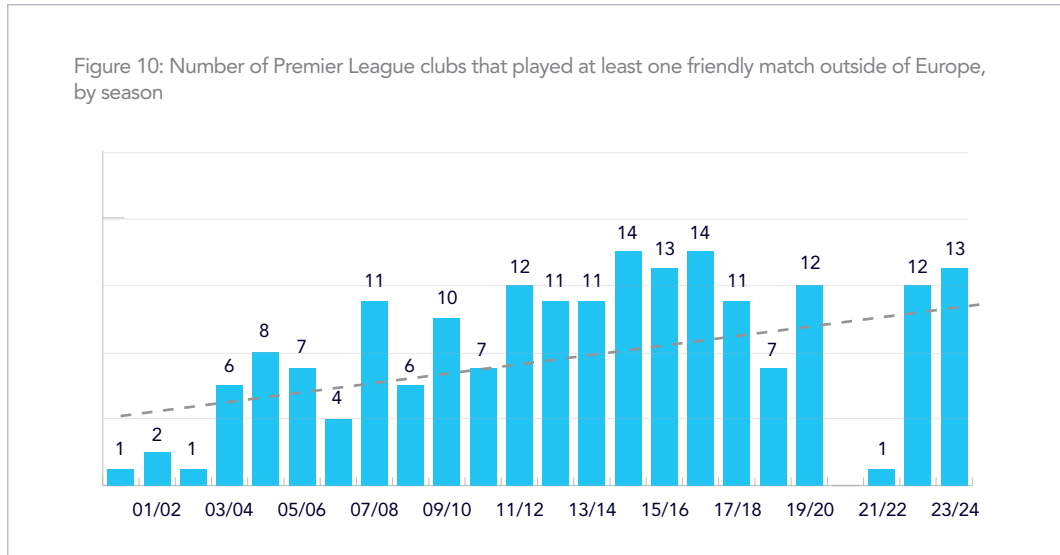
The figures and statistics presented so far in relation to the calendar of official competitions at the top of European football set the context to analyse the trends that have been characterising elite club activities during the non-competitive months of the season. The top European clubs have been increasingly embarking on international tours in recent years, looking to engage with overseas audiences through the participation in friendly matches organized directly by the clubs themselves, by private promoters or, such it has been the case for some English clubs, by their respective domestic league.

As shown in Figure 9, the top 15 European clubs by number of friendlies played outside of Europe between July 2010 and May 2024 accounted for a total of 543 such matches. Not surprisingly, considering the international success and global reach of the Premier League, two English clubs (and Real Madrid) are at the top of this specific ranking.

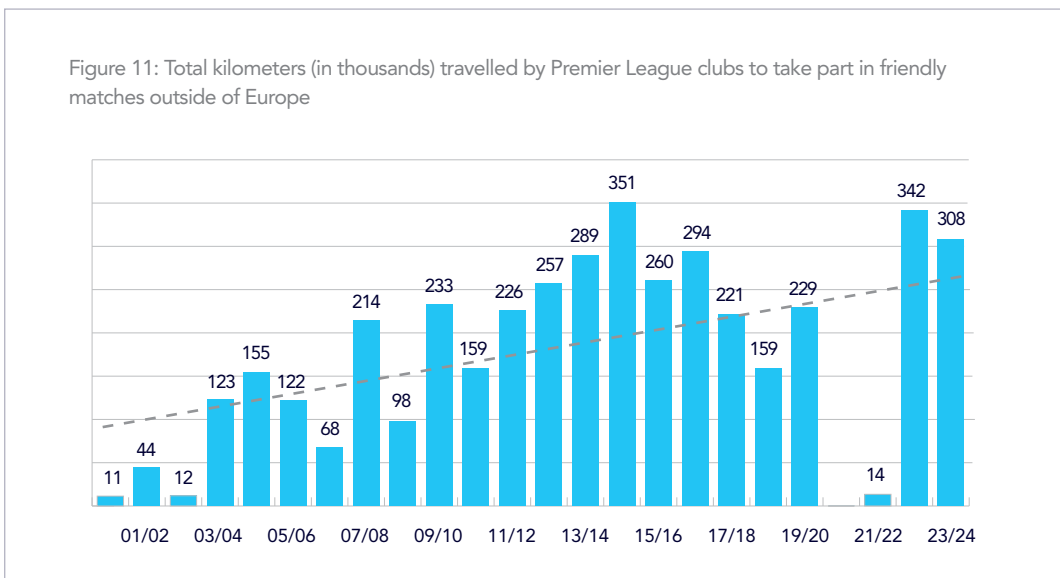
Figure 9: European clubs by number of friendlies played outside of Europe between July 2010 and May 2024



The main point of difference between the English top-tier division and the other big-5 leagues, however, is that is not just a case of the more successful or renowned clubs in the Premier League travelling afar for friendly tours. Since 2011, every season but one (when discounting the two summers impacted by COVID), has seen more than half of the clubs in the league take part in at least one non-official game outside of Europe. In several cases, that has been the case for approximately two-thirds of the clubs in the league.

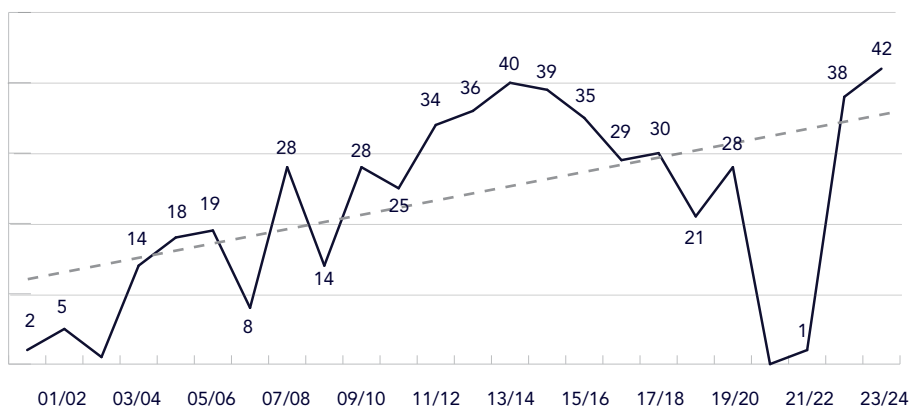


With many of the above-mentioned summer tours involving games in different cities and, oftentimes, countries, the total amount of kilometers travelled provides for another interesting metric to illustrate the increasing drive for internationalisation of elite club football. On average, Premier League clubs have travelled more than 300 thousand kilometers per season in the two years that followed the pandemic period - with values that were close to the record of 350,649 kilometers set in 2014/2015. The friendlies played by Newcastle and West Ham in New Zealand in July 2014 are still associated with the highest individual distances covered by an English club to participate in a summer tour over the past 25 years.



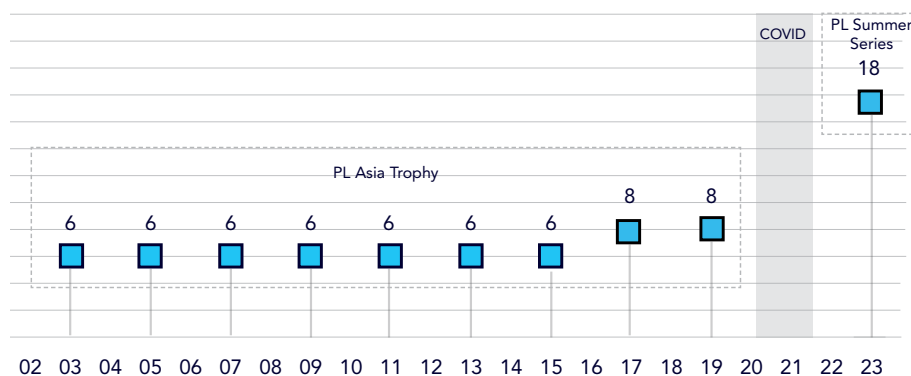
The trends illustrated so far are naturally reflected also in the number of overseas friendlies played by Premier League clubs on a season basis. The recently completed 2023/2024 season set a new record in this regard. At individual club level the biggest contributors to this number were Chelsea - who played five matches in the United States between July and August 2023 - and Newcastle, which, amongst others, also took part in a post-season tour that involved them travelling to Australia a few days after the end of the Premier League season in May 2024.

Figure 12: Number of friendly matches played by Premier League clubs outside of Europe

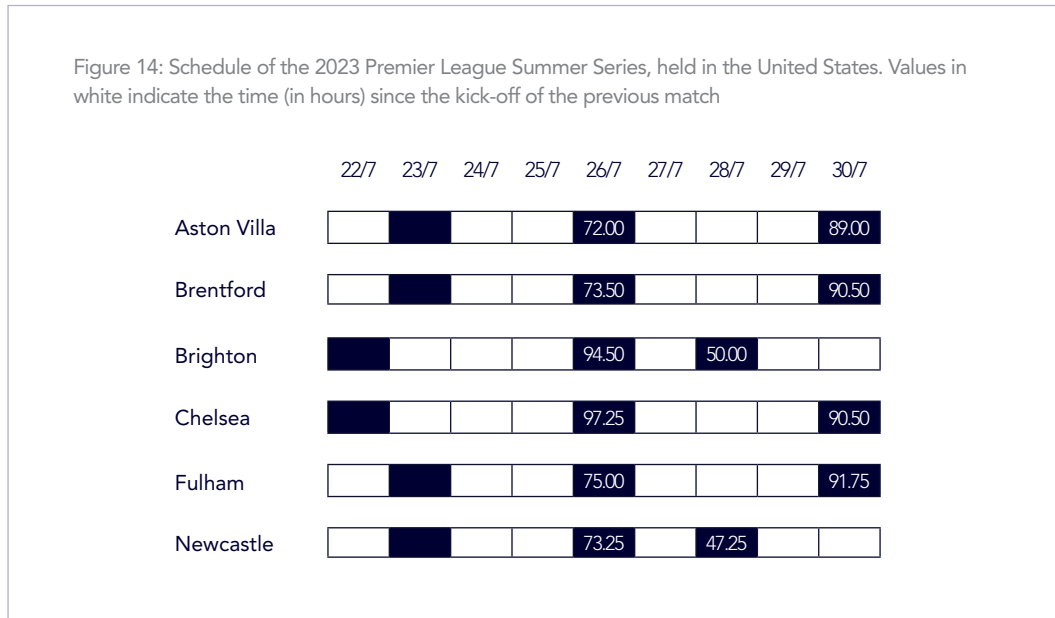


Partially explaining the above was also the staging of the first Premier League Summer Series - a competition officially affiliated to the Premier League that saw six clubs (Aston Villa, Brentford, Brighton & Hove Albion, Chelsea, Fulham and Newcastle) play a total of 18 matches in the United States between the 22nd and the 30th of July 2023. This event signalled the introduction of the second pre-season competition to be ever affiliated to the League. The Premier League Asia Trophy, which used to involve between three and four of the League's clubs in each of its editions, was previously held on a biennial basis between 2003 and 2019.

Figure 13: Number of friendly matches played by Premier League clubs outside of Europe as part of summer tours officially affiliated to the League

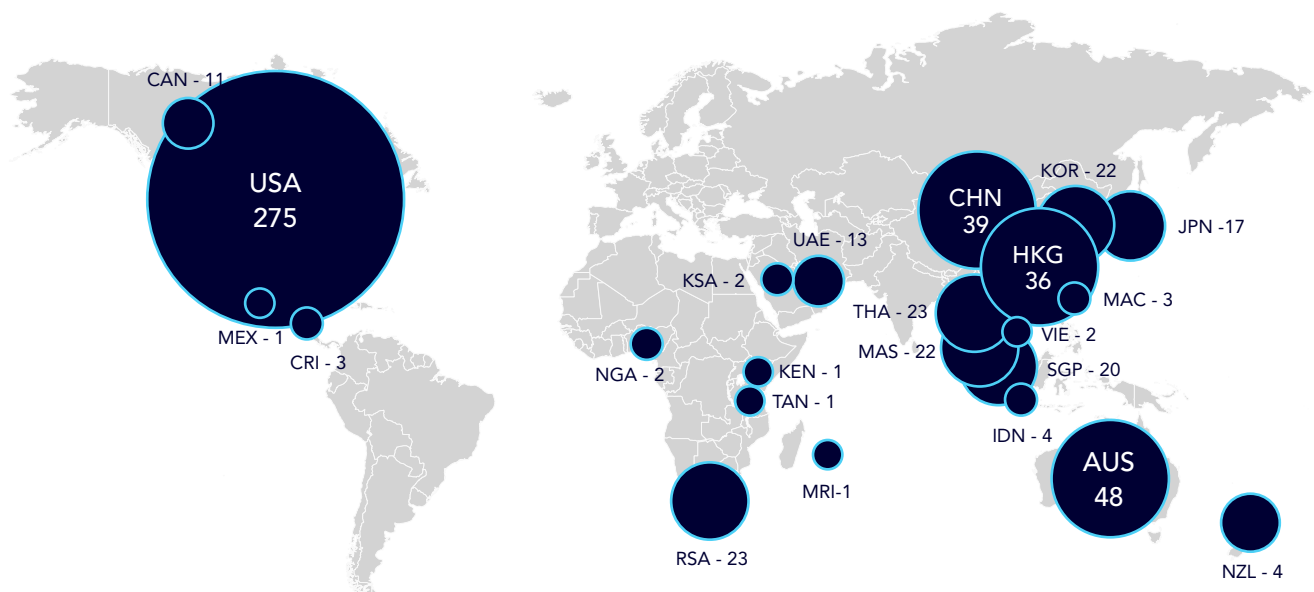


Interestingly, the 2023 Premier League Summer Series also offers an insight into the calendar challenges that may be associated also to the organisation of pre-season events. In this particular case, these were manifested by the fact that Newcastle United had to play two games within less than 48 hours from one another and, similarly, Brighton had to take the field 50 hours after the kick-off time of their previous game.



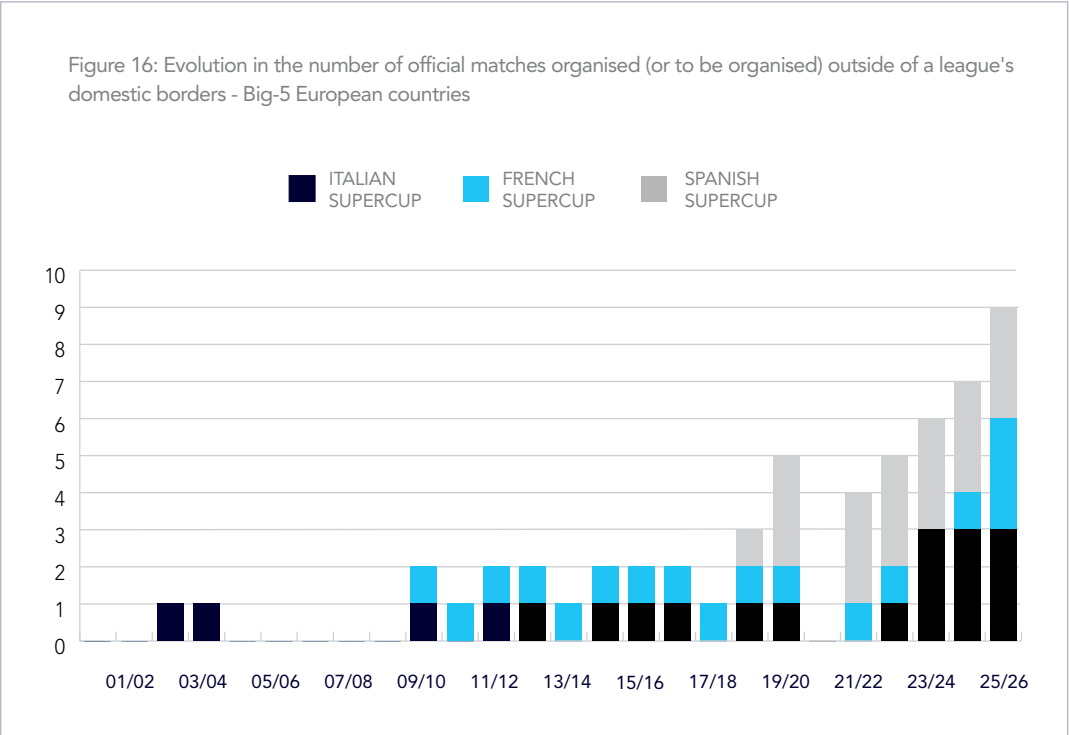
Premier League clubs have played a total of 573 overseas friendlies between July 2000 and May 2024, visiting 23 different countries in the process and reaching out to nearly every continent in the world. Figure 15, offers a visual illustration of the geographical spread of these matches.

Figure 15: Location of the 573 friendly matches played by Premier League clubs outside of Europe since July 2000



Club friendlies, and the case of the Premier League more specifically, serve as the best example to analyse the internationalisation trend that is now typical for elite club football at European level. However, they do not represent the only case where this scenario is evident. Since several years now, some of the most prominent leagues or national associations in the continent have been staging official competitions - namely, super cup finals - outside of their domestic borders.

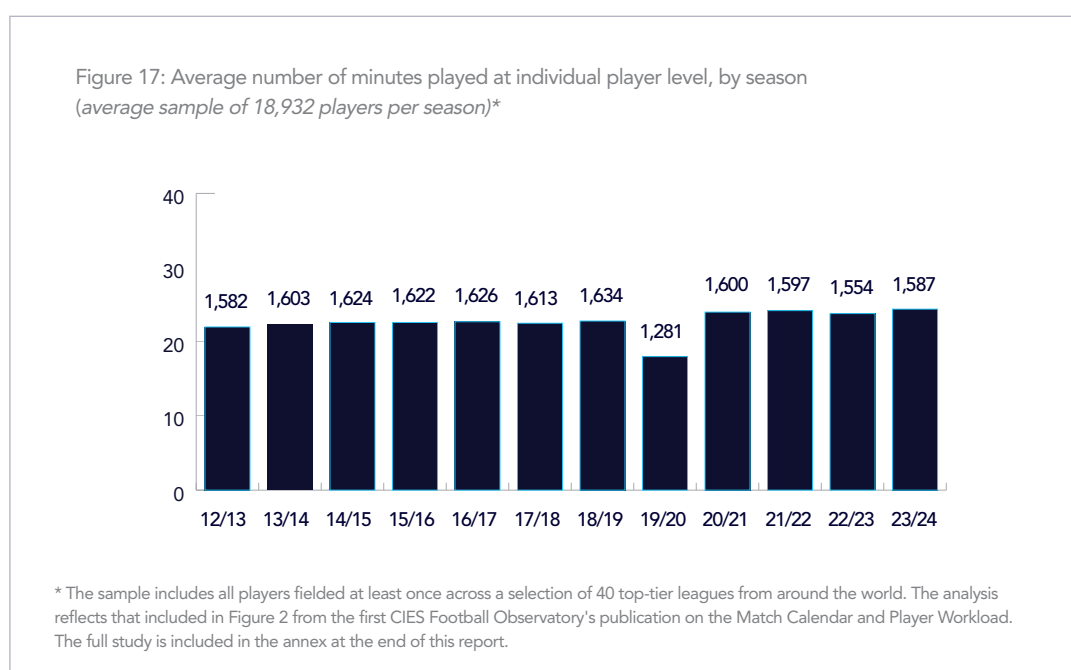
The tendency, which started with the organisation of the 1993 Italian Super Cup in the United States, is becoming increasingly predominant and has currently been adopted on a regular basis in the cases of France, Italy and Spain. Within this context, the progressive transition from single final to final four formats will result in a total of at least nine official matches held abroad starting from the 2025/2026 season.



THE MEN'S FOOTBALL MATCH CALENDAR AT ELITE LEVEL - PLAYER WORKLOAD

The first section of this report provided insights into the structure of the football calendar at elite level, the organisation of official competitions and matches and the activities of elite clubs during the non-competitive months of the off-season. Here, the emphasis is shifted towards the perspective of players, in an attempt to evaluate some of the workload requirements associated with the scenario presented so far.

In its first report on the subject of the Match Calendar and Player Workload - one that includes data for a approximately 20,000 players per season (the full study is included in the annex at the end of this report) - the CIES Football Observatory found that, at individual player level, the average minutes played have generally remained unvaried over the course of the past twelve years (with the exception of the 20/21 season, impacted by COVID).



This finding, that is in a certain way contrary to the narrative currently popular within the football ecosystem, appears to be reinforced by additional analyses and case studies focusing on players competing at European top division level. Table 1 - listing the 30 outfield players that accumulated the highest number of minutes (both club and national team) on a single season basis since 1998/1999 - delivers results that, from a timeline perspective, are mixed to say the least. The all-time record of 6,258 minutes - the equivalent of nearly 70 full matches - was set by David Luiz in the 2012/2013 season, during which he represented Chelsea and the Brazilian national team. The second highest value dates back even further, to Frank Lampard's 2006/2007 campaign with Chelsea and England. Interestingly, Bruno Fernandes (6th) is the only player in the top ten related to a season that does not predate 2013 at least.

Table 1: Top 30 outfield players by total amount of minutes played over the course of a single season (club and national team minutes, 1998/1999 to 2023/2024)

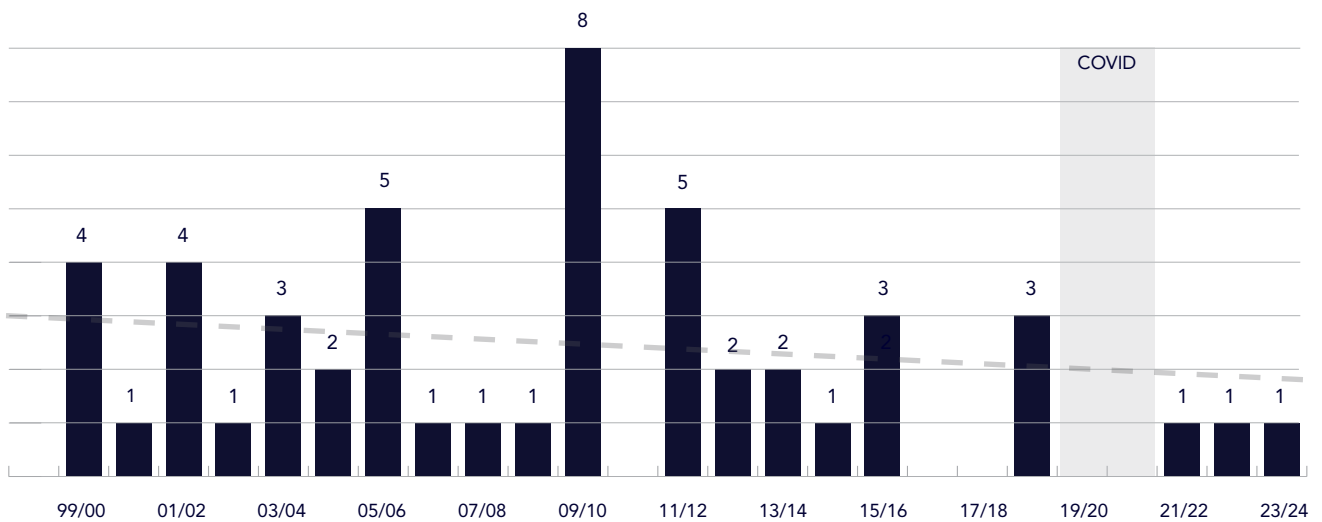
Player	Season	99 01 03 05 07 09 11 13 15 17 19 21 23	Minutes	Min/90
David Luiz	BRA 2012/13		6'258	69.5
Frank Lampard	ENG 2006/07		6'241	69.3
Roberto Carlos	BRA 1999/00		6'130	68.1
Joris Mathijsen	NED 2009/10		6'128	68.0
Cristiano Ronaldo	POR 2011/12		6'116	68.0
Bruno Fernandes	POR 2022/23		6'072	67.5
Philipp Lahm	GER 2009/10		6'044	67.2
Lionel Messi	ARG 2011/12		6'031	67.0
Jamie Carragher	ENG 2005/06		5'958	66.2
Raúl	ESP 1999/00		5'948	66.1
Sami Hyypiä	FIN 2000/01		5'925	65.8
Chris Smalling	ENG 2015/16		5'924	65.8
Javier Zanetti	ARG 2003/04		5'920	65.8
Frank Lampard	ENG 2003/04		5'888	65.4
Lionel Messi	ARG 2014/15		5'885	65.4
Frank Lampard	ENG 2008/09		5'859	65.1
Per Mertesacker	GER 2013/14		5'850	65.0
Daley Blind	NED 2018/19		5'849	65.0
Adil Rami	FRA 2011/12		5'843	64.9
Per Mertesacker	GER 2013/14		5'836	64.8
Maicon	BRA 2009/10		5'827	64.7
Ruben Dias	POR 2018/19		5'790	64.3
Sami Hyypiä	FIN 2002/03		5'782	64.2
Lucio	BRA 2001/02		5'780	64.2
Dirk Kuyt	NED 2009/10		5'753	63.9
Xabi Alonso	ESP 2011/12		5'743	63.8
Branislav Ivanovic	SRB 2012/13		5'736	63.7
Antonio Rüdiger	GER 2021/22		5'736	63.7
Leonardo Bonucci	ITA 2015/16		5'733	63.7
Matthijs de Ligt	NED 2018/19		5'733	63.7

The analysis includes all players competing in the top divisions of Belgium, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

* Season 2020/2021 has been excluded from the analysis to discount the effects of the extraordinary schedule of fixtures implemented in the post-pandemic period.

Similar findings can be extracted by extending the analysis to the top 50 players by total number of minutes played over the course of a single campaign. Perhaps surprisingly, the three most recently completed seasons only account for a small minority of the observations included in this range. Whilst the highest value was recorded in relation to the 2009/2010 season, other peaks can be identified as far back as 1999, 2001, 2005 and, more recently, in 2012. Indeed, as illustrated in Figure 18, the overall trend has been on a decreasing trajectory over the past 25 years, even when discounting the two seasons impacted by the pandemic.

Figure 18: Top 50 outfield players by total amount of minutes played over the course of a single season (club and national team minutes, 1998/1999 to 2023/2024)



The analysis includes all players competing in the top divisions of Belgium, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

* Season 2020/2021 has been excluded from the analysis to discount the effects of the extraordinary schedule of fixtures implemented in the post-pandemic period.

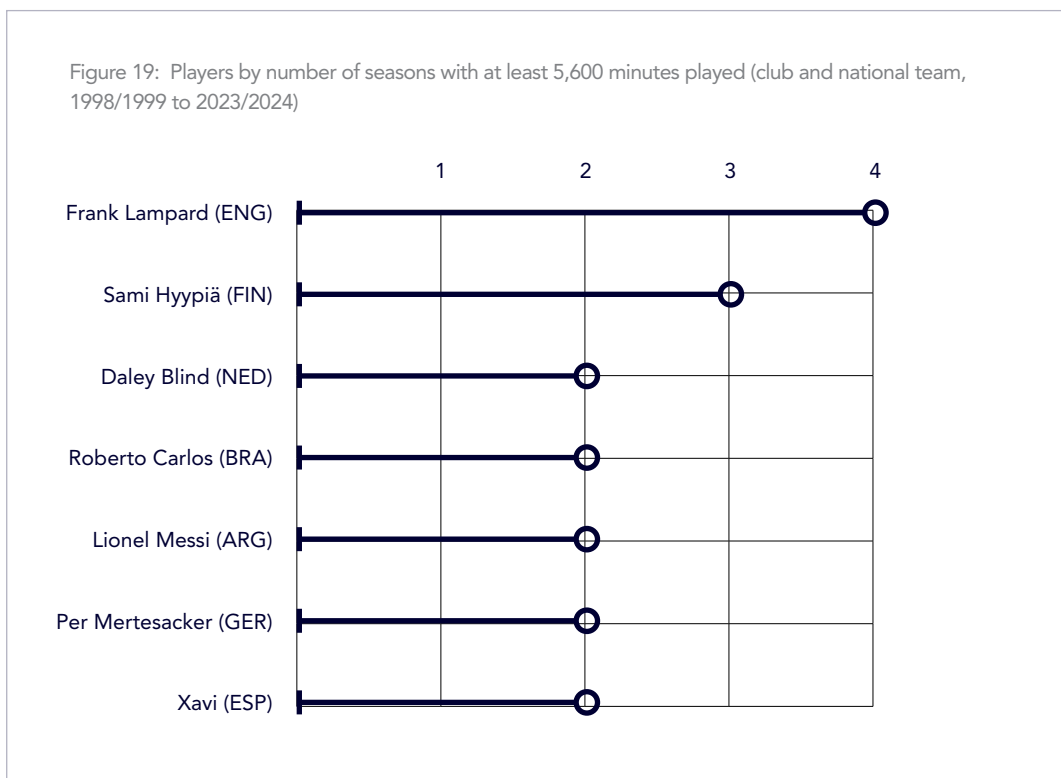
Table 2, which narrows down the scope of the analysis to players from the same nationality and includes the top five ranked countries in FIFA/Coca-Cola World Ranking, shows that no player from France has ever been fielded for the equivalent of 65 full matches during the course of the same season. By way of comparison, that is instead true for all five seasons (and three players) represented in the case of England. Overall, only two of the 25 listed seasons came after 2015 - namely Antoine Griezmann's 2015/2016 campaign playing for Atlético Madrid and France and that related to Chris Smalling's 55 appearances for Manchester United and eleven caps for England, also in 2015/2016.

Table 2: Top five outfield players by total amount of minutes played over the course of a single season (club and national team, 1998/1999 to 2023/2024). Top five countries in the FIFA/Coca-Cola World Ranking.

	Player	Season	99	01	03	05	07	09	11	13	15	17	19	21	23	Minutes	Min/90
ARGENTINA	Lionel Messi	2011/12														6'031	67.0
	Javier Zanetti	2003/04														5'920	65.8
	Lionel Messi	2014/15														5'885	65.4
	Javier Zanetti	2008/09														5'550	61.7
	Lionel Messi	2010/11														5'533	61.5
FRANCE	Adil Rami	2011/12														5'843	64.9
	Lilian Thuram	1999/00														5'653	62.8
	Patrick Vieira	2001/02														5'601	62.2
	Thierry Henry	2002/03														5'601	62.2
	Antoine Griezmann	2015/16														5'524	61.4
SPAIN	Raúl	1999/00														5'948	66.1
	Xabi Alonso	2011/12														5'743	63.8
	Sergio Ramos	2011/12														5'729	63.7
	Carles Puyol	2005/06														5'701	63.3
	Xavi	2009/10														5'699	63.3
ENGLAND	Frank Lampard	2006/07														6'241	69.3
	Jamie Carragher	2005/06														5'958	66.2
	Chris Smalling	2015/16														5'924	65.8
	Frank Lampard	2003/04														5'888	65.4
	Frank Lampard	2008/09														5'859	65.1
BRAZIL	David Luiz	2012/13														6'258	69.5
	Roberto Carlos	1999/00														6'130	68.1
	Maicon	2009/10														5'827	64.7
	Lucio	2001/02														5'780	64.2
	Roberto Carlos	2001/02														5'732	63.7

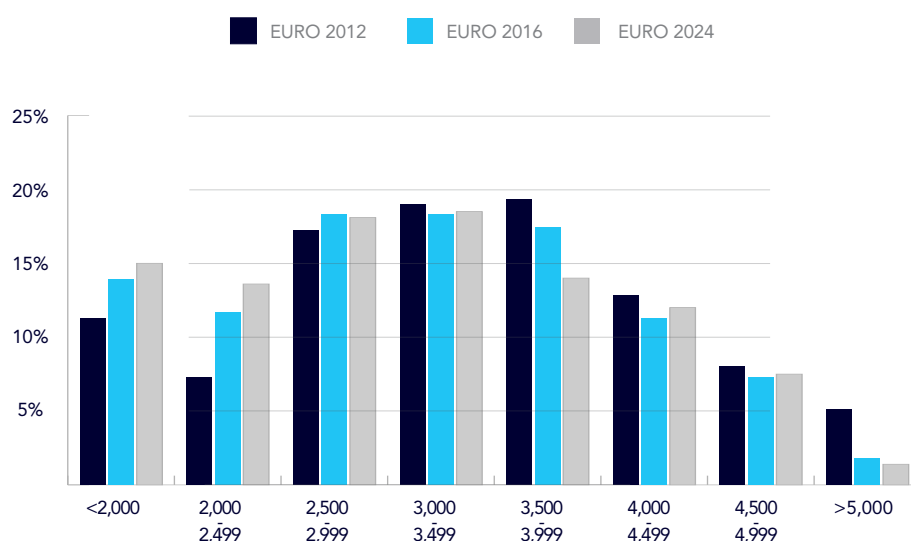
The analysis includes all players competing in the top divisions of Belgium, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain
 * Season 2020/2021 has been excluded from the analysis to discount the effects of the extraordinary schedule of fixtures implemented in the post-pandemic period.

Some of the individual statistics illustrated so far may be the consequence of 'extraordinary' seasons and, as such, represent one-off events. Notwithstanding this, Figure 19 appears to suggest that the first 15 years of the new century used to be consistently more demanding from an elite player workload perspective. Nearly two thirds (64%) of the 17 seasons associated to the players represented multiple times amongst the top 50 by minutes played in a single season are comprised between the years 2000 and 2010. A total of 88% precede 2015. Frank Lampard recorded a total of four seasons with more than 5,600 minutes on the pitch (which is, coincidentally, the approximate threshold of the above-mentioned top 50), with two of them - 2003/2004 and 2004/2005 - being consecutive. Sami Hyypiä was the only other player to achieve that feat more than two times, in 2001, 2003 and 2006.



Other statistics reinforce the concept that, at least at the very elite level, players are not necessarily playing more today, compared to what it was previously the case. Figure 20 - one that considers the past three comparable editions of the UEFA European Championship (Euro 2020 was not included because of the 'extraordinary' nature of the 2020/2021 football season) - shows that the 2024 tournament was the one that counted with the least number of players (seven, or 1.4%) having played more than 5,000 minutes in the lead up to the tournament (only players with at least one appearance during the Euro are included in the analysis). The number goes up to 44 (8.9%) when the analysis is extended to players having played at least 4,500 minutes. That value is substantially equal to that recorded in the case of Euro 2016 (41, or 9.0%) and lower than that related to the 2012 edition of the tournament (13%) - the last one to be contended by 16 teams only.

Figure 20: Players fielded at the three most recently comparable editions of the UEFA European Championships, by range of minutes played in the lead up to the tournament.*



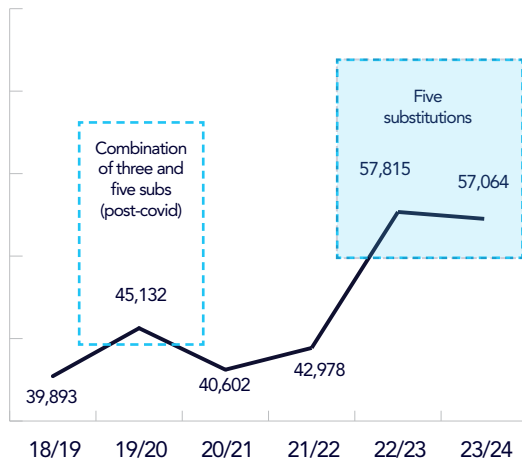
* Data for Euro 2020 was excluded from the analysis because affected by the extraordinary schedule of fixtures implemented across Europe in the post-pandemic period.

Whilst detailed studies would be required to determine the exact reasons behind these trends, at least two factors may be cited as plausible partial causes. The first is represented by the fact that - due to the market dynamics that have shaped club football in recent decades - the biggest clubs tend to count today with much better assorted squads, allowing for a more efficient rotation of players during the course of a season. The other, result of a more recent development, refers to the introduction of the five substitutions in official competitions. Figure 21 highlights the impact from the introduction of the five changes in four of the big-5 European leagues (the case of the French *Ligue 1* has not been included because of the league's reduction to 18 teams in 2023/2024, which affected data comparability).

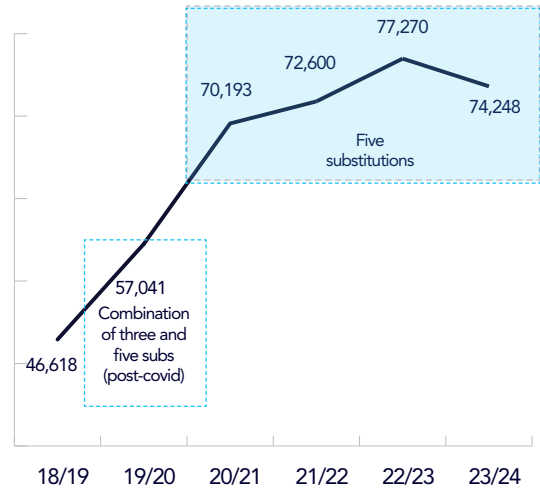
On an aggregate average, substitutes have played 86,775 additional minutes per season since the permanent introduction of the five changes in the four leagues analysed. This value represents a 51.1% increase compared to the total recorded during the last year with only three substitutions allowed and, in a zero-sum game, amounts to an equally lesser total of minutes on the pitch for players initially in the starting eleven. Premier League clubs are the ones that made the least of the new possibility, with an average growth in minutes played by substitutes of 34%. By way of comparison, the same value amounted to 63% for the Spanish La Liga, 58% for the Italian Serie A and 49% in the case of the German Bundesliga. Interestingly, the 2023/2024 seasons registered a slight decrease in substitute minutes across all of the four leagues considered. Future data will help assessing whether this was just a coincidence or the initial sign of a trend that will be confirmed in the upcoming years.

Figure 21: Total minutes (in thousands) played by substitutes (top divisions in England, Germany, Italy and Spain, 2018-2024)

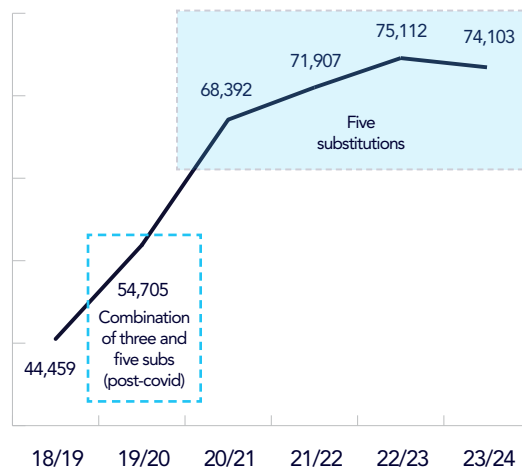
Premier League (England, 20 teams)



Serie A (Italy, 20 teams)



La Liga (Spain, 20 teams)



Bundesliga (Germany, 18 teams)

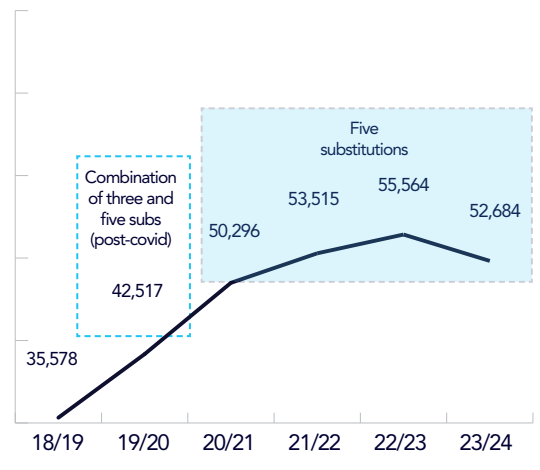
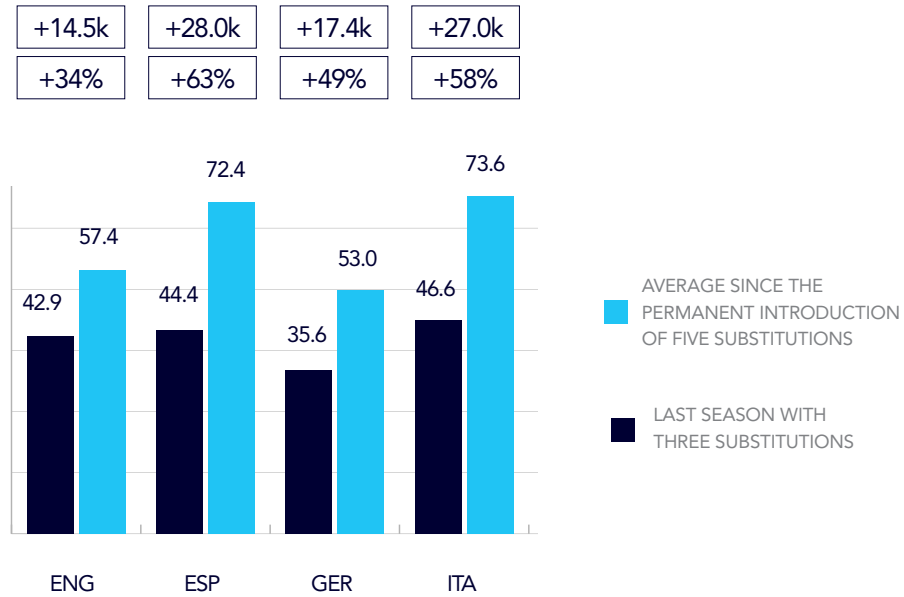
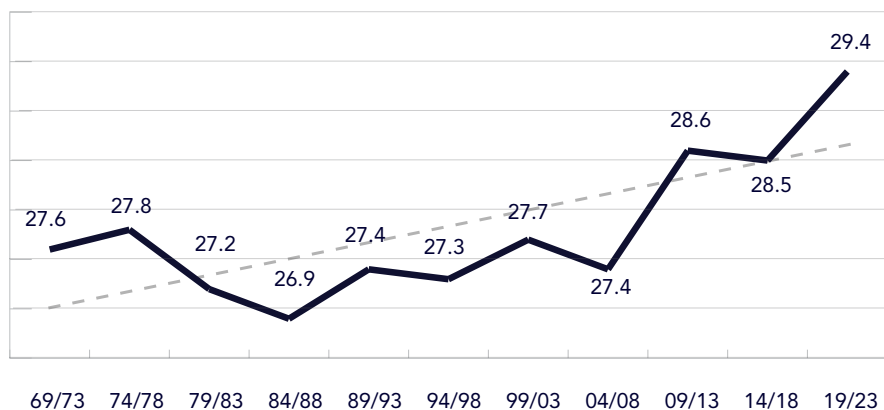


Figure 22: Comparative analyses of minutes (in thousands) played by substitutes (top divisions in England, Germany, Italy and Spain, 2018-2024)



Whilst there appear to be no evident signs of a significant increase in elite player workload over the past three decades, considerable improvements were certainly made under many aspects related to players' welfare. Whilst it goes beyond the scope of this report to assess the extent of these advancements, it may be argued that the standards in the areas of player conditioning, recovery, nutrition and medical care, amongst others, have been significantly raised since the turn of the century. These factors may contribute in explaining the trend that sees elite football players being able to perform at the highest level for an increasingly longer period of time. As detailed in Figure 23, the average age of the top ten ranked players in the Ballon d'Or has been continuously growing in recent years and, when five-year periods are considered, is currently by far the highest it has ever been.

Figure 23: Average age of the top ten ranked players in the *Ballon d'Or*, by five-year periods




The trend is confirmed also by the analysis that considers all the players to have ever achieved at least 100 international caps and, in particular, a total international career span of at least 15 years. Indeed, as shown in Figure 24, that is a feature that is becoming increasingly common. Nearly two thirds (65%) of the 229 of the players that fit in this category have played their last (or latest) international match within the past decade.



CONCLUSIONS

Complementing the three CIES Football Observatory's publications on the topic of the football match calendar and players' workload, this report starts by providing additional insights into the current landscape of football competitions and matches at elite level. The initial section of the study analyses the extent to which a four-year cycle is occupied by official domestic and international competitions, showing the prevalence of the former over the latter. In doing so, it also highlights some of the differences that exist between individual countries in terms of structure, and number, of domestic competitions.

Against this background, the focus of the analysis is then shifted to the growing internationalisation trend – most notably in the form of summer friendlies and tour – that has characterized elite club football in recent years. Whilst this is far from being a Premier League-only scenario, the case of the English top division serves as the best example to analyze this phenomenon on a league-wide basis. Besides friendlies, the internationalisation drive of elite European club football is evidenced also by the increasing number of official matches – namely super cup finals – held outside a league's domestic borders.



The second section of the report focuses on the perspective of players and on the workload associated to the current scenario of elite club and national team competitions. The analysis on the top 30 players by number of minutes played over the course of a single season since 1998/1999 suggests that, from this perspective, there has been no evident increase in the demands placed upon elite footballers. With the record figure being represented by David Luiz's 2012/2013 season for Chelsea and Brazil, the following highest values refer to Frank Lampard and Roberto Carlos's seasons in 2006/2007 and 1999/2000 respectively. This finding is reinforced also by the analyses related to players that participated in the last three comparable editions of the UEFA European Championships.

Plausible causes to explain the above-mentioned scenario are the trend that see the biggest European clubs being increasingly able to assemble better assorted squads, and therefore more efficiently rotate players during the course of a season, and the introduction of five substitutions in official competitions. On an aggregate average, substitutes have played 86,775 additional minutes per season since the permanent introduction of the five changes in the top divisions of England, Germany, Italy and Spain. These factors, coupled with the improvements that took place in several areas related to players' welfare since the turn of the century, appear to be resulting in elite player careers getting increasingly longer. The average age of the top ten ranked players at the Ballon d'Or is currently the highest it has ever been. In terms of timeline of events, similar results are delivered by the analysis of players to have ever collected at least 100 international caps across a career span of at least 15 years.

Through a series of cases studies and analyses, the report provides an empirical outlook on both current and historical trends related to the elite men's football calendar of matches and player workload. Notwithstanding the importance of the international calendar's structure, the study underlines the prominent role of domestic bodies (i.e. leagues or national associations) as competition organisers, highlighting some of the differences that exist at individual country level. Moreover, it illustrates that, somewhat contrary to the current narrative within the football ecosystem, there appears to be no record of an increase in elite player workload since the turn of the century.

Whilst the report concludes the first CIES series on the subject of the men's football calendar and player workload, additional studies may be undertaken in the future to further delve into these important topics. The way in which competitions and matches are structured and organised within the framework of the international match calendar is an aspect that goes to the core of the governance of the game. Within this context, understanding both the historical and current landscape may prove beneficial in informing the policy and decision-making involved with the actual scenario.

ANNEX

REPORT 1: NUMBER OF MATCHES AND WEIGHT OF ORGANISERS

INTRODUCTION

This first report of the CIES Football Observatory Summer Series on Match Calendar and Player Workload in men's football analyses trends in the number of games and minutes per season played by footballers. The sample covers players from 40 of the world's top leagues from five confederations over the period 2012/13-2023/24. The study also investigates the proportions of matches played from the point of view of the competition organisers (leagues, associations, confederations, FIFA).

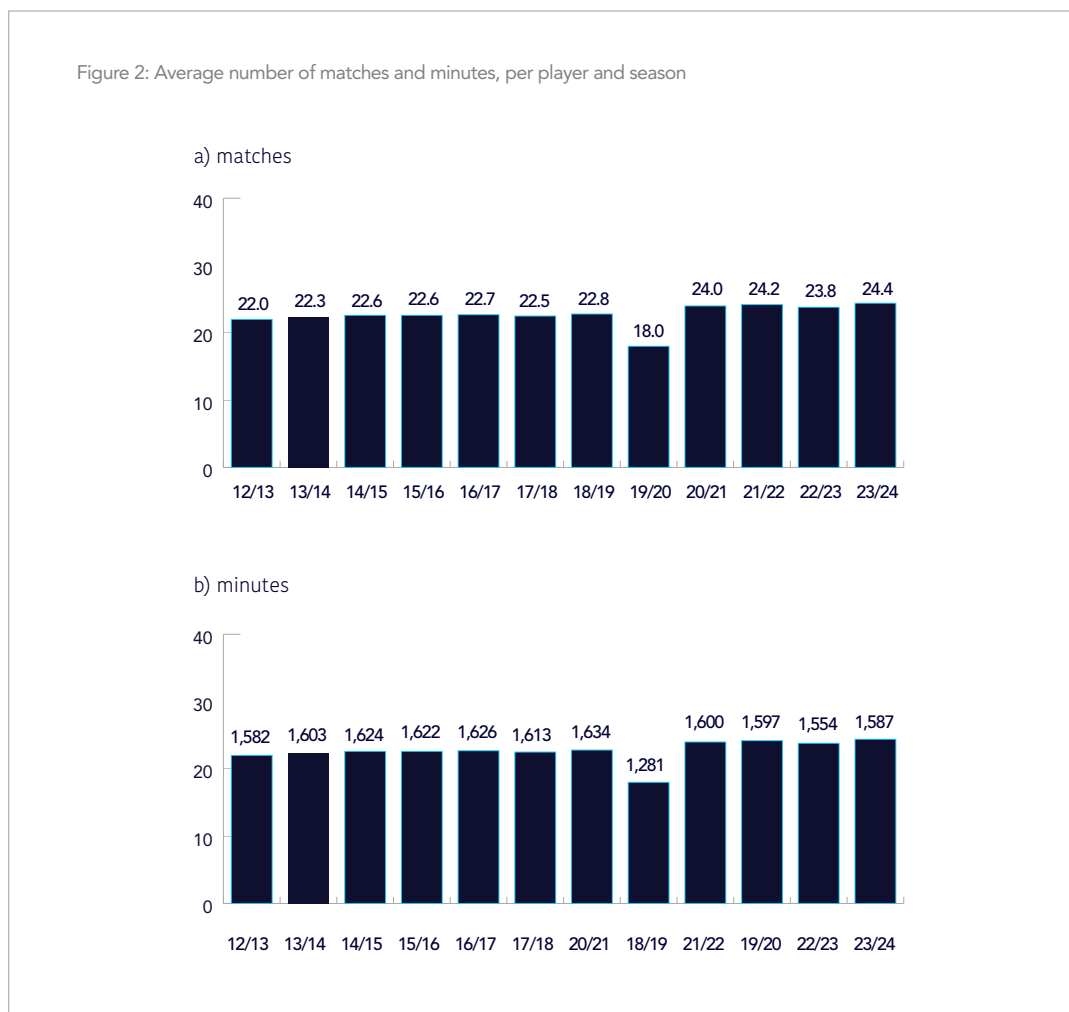
Furthermore, the report looks ahead and presents a projection of the potential number of matches and minutes per season by type of organiser over the period 2024/25- 2027/28, taking into consideration the changes already planned in the format of certain competitions (both at club and national team level). For each season, we have considered all the official senior competition matches played by footballers fielded in one or more of the 40 leagues surveyed, both for clubs (excluding friendly matches) and national teams (including here friendly matches at national A-teams level, as well as U20/U21/U23 official games).



In total, the sample includes 62'156 footballers who have played at least one match in at least one season in the leagues analysed. The average per season over the entire period analysed is 18932 players, with an observable increase from 2020 onwards likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors such as the introduction of the possibility of making five substitutions and the corresponding increase in squad sizes.

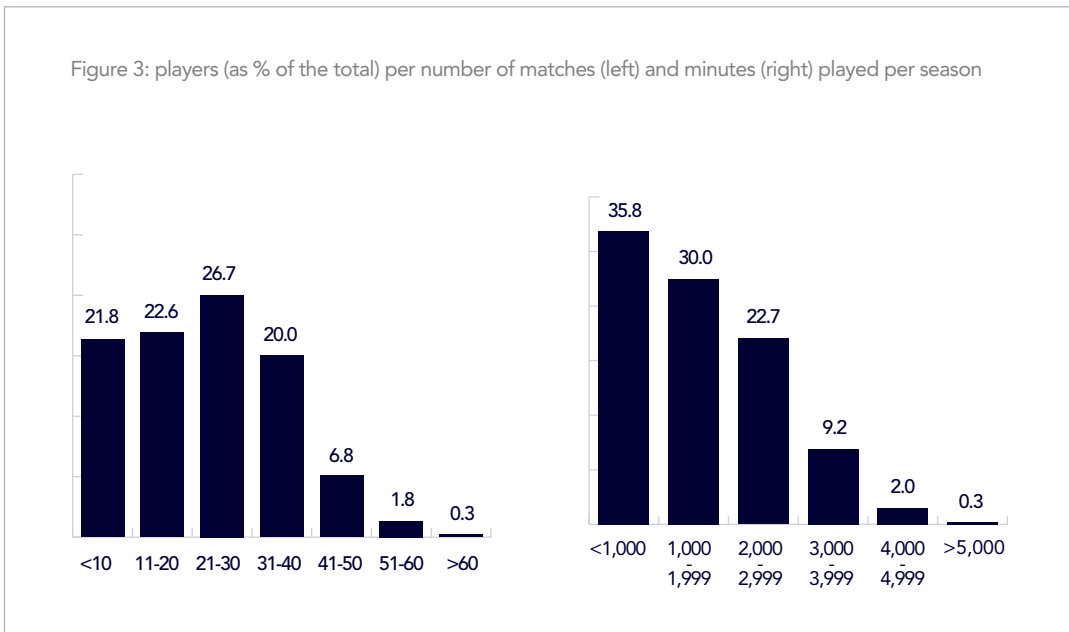
ANALYSIS 2021-2024

On a seasonal average over the twelve years analysed, footballers in the leagues studied played 22.7 matches across all competitions, ranging from 18.0 games during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019/20 to a maximum of 24.4 in 2023/24. However, unlike the number of matches, there has been no increase in the average number of minutes played per player and season, mainly due to the introduction of the five substitutions rule and squad size increase.

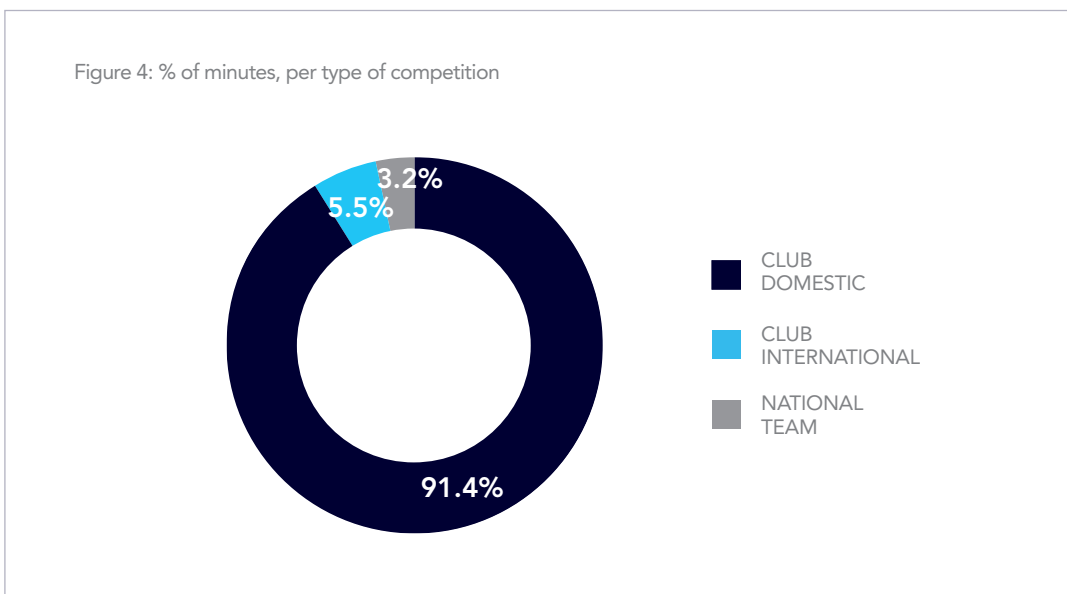


As a seasonal average, only 0.31% of players surveyed (61 footballers per season) played more than 60 matches in all competitions combined. The maximum was 1.0% in 2020/21 due to the catching up of fixtures postponed during the pandemic. This proportion is also low for footballers who took part in more than fifty (2.2%) and forty games (9.1%). At the opposite end, about 44% of footballers played 20 matches at most and 70.9% a maximum of 30 fixtures all competitions included.

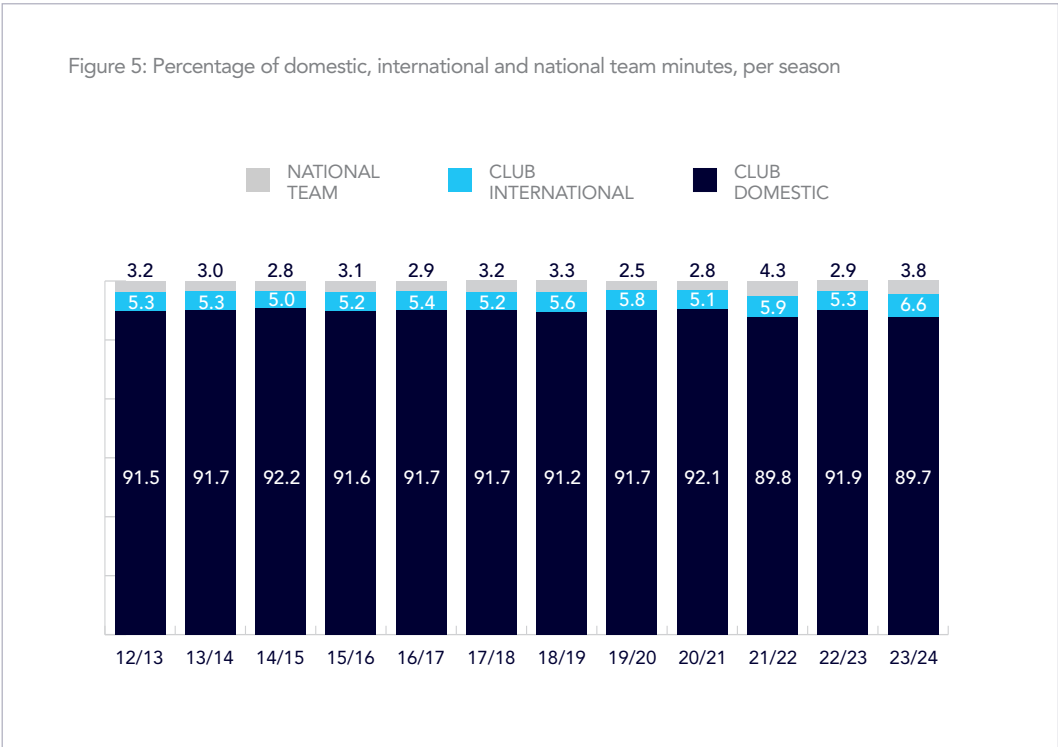
With regard to minutes, 0.29% of players per season (on average 56 footballers) were fielded for more than 5000 minutes all competitions combined during the twelve-year period studied. At the opposite end, over one third played less than 1000 minutes and almost two thirds less than 2000 minutes. This confirms previous findings on the low proportion of highly-used players.



Overall, even with a sample made up of the most competitive leagues with many full international players, as in the current study, the overwhelming majority of minutes were played at club level: 91.4% domestically (league and national cups) and 5.5% internationally (continental cups). The national senior, U23, U21 and U20 teams accounted for just 3.2% of total time played by footballers surveyed during the twelve-season period analysed

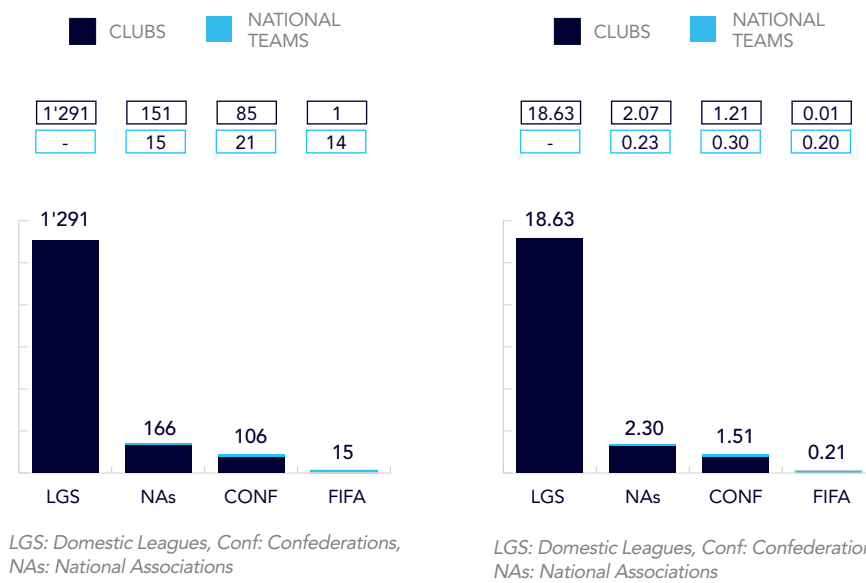


The proportion of minutes played by footballers from the 40 leagues studied in national teams at adult level or in youth categories from U20 upwards has never exceeded 4.3% (in 2021/22). The proportions have remained generally stable over the timeframe analysed. The small variations observed mainly mirror the calendar of major events that do not take place every year. The share of minutes played for clubs at international level tententially increased throughout the period analysed: from a minimum of 5.0% in 2014/15 to a maximum of 6.6% in 2023/24. This trend reflects the expansion of competitions organised by the confederations on a continental scale, both in Europe and the rest of the world. Minutes played in national club competitions, and primarily in the domestic league, account for by far the largest share of player participation, with values never lower than 89.7% for all seasons surveyed. The percentages measured would be even higher if the sample of leagues covered had been extended to championships with fewer clubs and players taking part in international competitions.



The same analyses presented above were carried out on the basis of the type of competition organiser, with four categories (league, association, confederations and FIFA) and the distinction between club and national teams matches for the three organisers active at these two different levels (association, confederations and FIFA). The findings confirm that the national leagues are by far the main organisers of matches. Of the 22.65 matches played on average per season by footballers in the 40 leagues analysed, 18.63 were organised by the leagues, far more than those run by the second biggest organiser, the national associations (2.30 matches per player, club and national team fixtures combined). The same holds true with respect to minutes: 1291 per player and season for leagues versus 166 minutes for associations.

Figure 6: Average number of matches and minutes, per season and organiser



The analysis of the distribution of minutes played by the footballers of the 40 leagues analysed according to the type of organiser confirms the previous result. Over four-fifths of the playing time during the twelve seasons studied were spent in matches of competitions organised by national leagues. In contrast, confederations accounted for 6.9% of total minutes and FIFA for less than 1% (mainly national team matches).

Figure 7: Percentage of minutes, per organiser

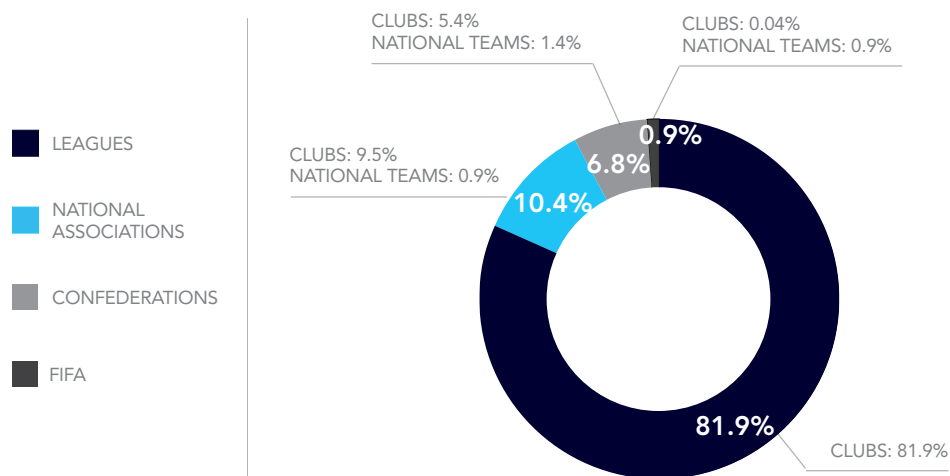






















































































Figure 8 shows the evolution of the percentage of minutes by type of organiser over the twelve seasons analysed. The main change is the relative strengthening of the confederations compared with national associations. However, no weakening of the national leagues' clear-cut leadership in the men's football match calendar was observed. The latter always accounted for more than 80% of the minutes played by footballers in the 40 leagues studied.

Figure 8: Percentage of minutes, per organiser and season

	Leagues	Associations		Confederations		FIFA	
	Clubs	Clubs	National Teams	Clubs	National Teams	Clubs	National Teams
12/13	81.3% 	10.2% 	1.0% 	5.3% 	0.6% 	0.04% 	1.6% 
13/14	82.0% 	9.7% 	1.3% 	5.3% 	0.6% 	0.02% 	1.2% 
14/15	81.6% 	10.6% 	1.1% 	5.0% 	1.5% 	0.03% 	0.3% 
15/16	81.4% 	10.3% 	0.9% 	5.2% 	1.6% 	0.03% 	0.6% 
16/17	81.7% 	10.0% 	0.6% 	5.3% 	0.8% 	0.05% 	1.5% 
17/18	81.9% 	9.8% 	1.3% 	5.1% 	0.7% 	0.05% 	1.2% 
18/19	81.5% 	9.7% 	0.9% 	5.5% 	2.1% 	0.05% 	0.2% 
19/20	82.5% 	9.3% 	0.6% 	5.6% 	1.7% 	0.07% 	0.2% 
20/21	83.9% 	8.2% 	0.7% 	5.1% 	1.5% 	0.03% 	0.6% 
21/22	80.7% 	9.1% 	0.6% 	5.8% 	1.8% 	0.04% 	1.9% 
22/23	82.8% 	9.1% 	1.1% 	5.2% 	1.3% 	0.03% 	0.5% 
23/24	81.5% 	8.7% 	1.0% 	6.0% 	2.1% 	0.03% 	0.6% 

PROJECTIONS 2024-2028

The projections for 2024-2028 consider the format changes already planned for existing competitions, the statistics on the number and distribution of matches between players measured for the most recent seasons or editions only, so as to fully integrate recent competition format modifications (if no subsequent ones), as well as the changes in player turnover resulting from factors such as the possibility of making five substitutions instead of the three allowed until October 2021. According to our projections, footballers from the 40 leagues investigated will play a slightly higher average number of matches in all competitions combined (again without taking club friendlies into account) over the next four years, but the increase will be limited: from 24.09 matches per player per season between 2020 and 2024 to 24.45 games between 2024 and 2028 (+1.4%). However, no changes are expected in terms of minutes.

Figure 9: Average number of matches (left) and minutes (right) per player and season.

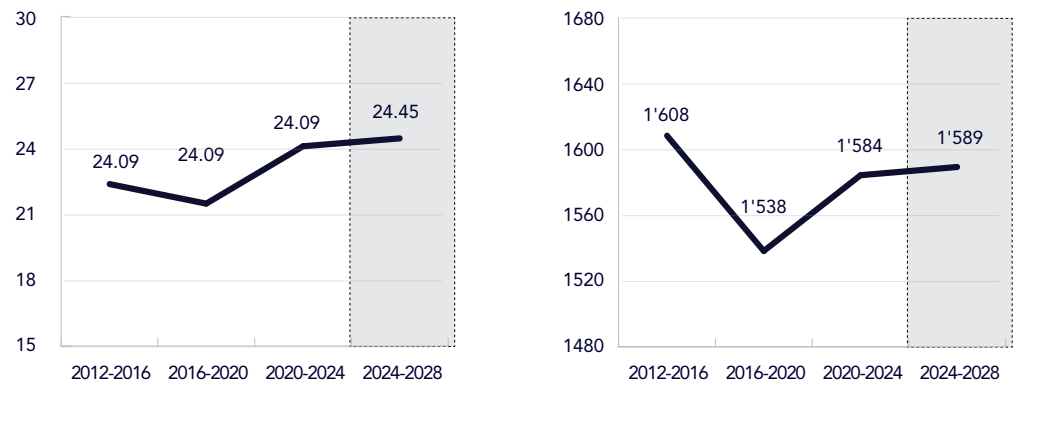
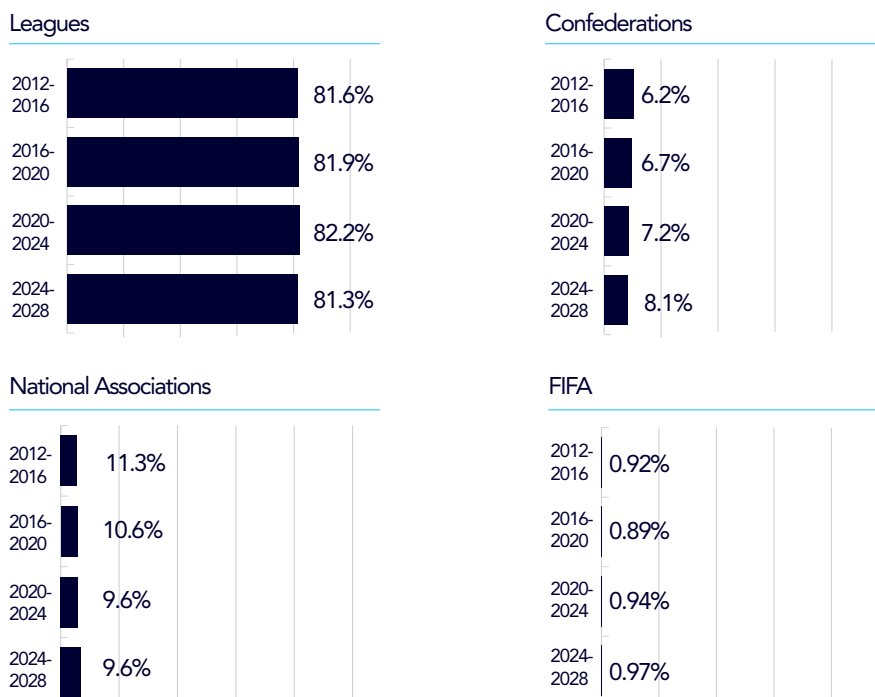


Figure 10 shows that there will be few changes in the relative weight of the main match organisers over the next four years compared with the last four. The principal evolution will be the absolute and relative increase in international club matches organised by confederations (from 7.2% to 8.1% of the total), which explains the slight decrease projected in the weight of national leagues (from 82.2% to 81.3%).

Figure 10: Percentage of minutes by competition organisers, per four-year cycle



CONCLUSIONS

The national leagues have the greatest weight in the organisation of men's world football. Between 2012 and 2024, they accounted for 82.2% of all matches played by footballers from 40 of the most competitive leagues around the world. The second largest organiser, national associations, accounted for 10.2% of matches, while confederations come third (6.7%), ahead of FIFA (0.9%). The analysis also indicates that the vast majority of players are not playing a high volume of matches. As a seasonal average, only 0.31% of footballers surveyed played more than 60 matches in all competitions combined, while 21.5% participated in ten matches at most. In terms of minutes, 0.29% of players were fielded for more than 5,000 minutes, compared to 35.8% who played less than 1,000 minutes.

According to our projections, footballers from the 40 leagues investigated will play the same amount of minutes and 1.4% more matches on average in all competitions combined (not including club friendlies) over the next four years compared to the last four: from 24.09 matches per player and season between 2020 and 2024 to 24.45 games between 2024 and 2028. The non-increase in expected minutes is driven by factors such as the five substitutions rule and trends in squad sizes.

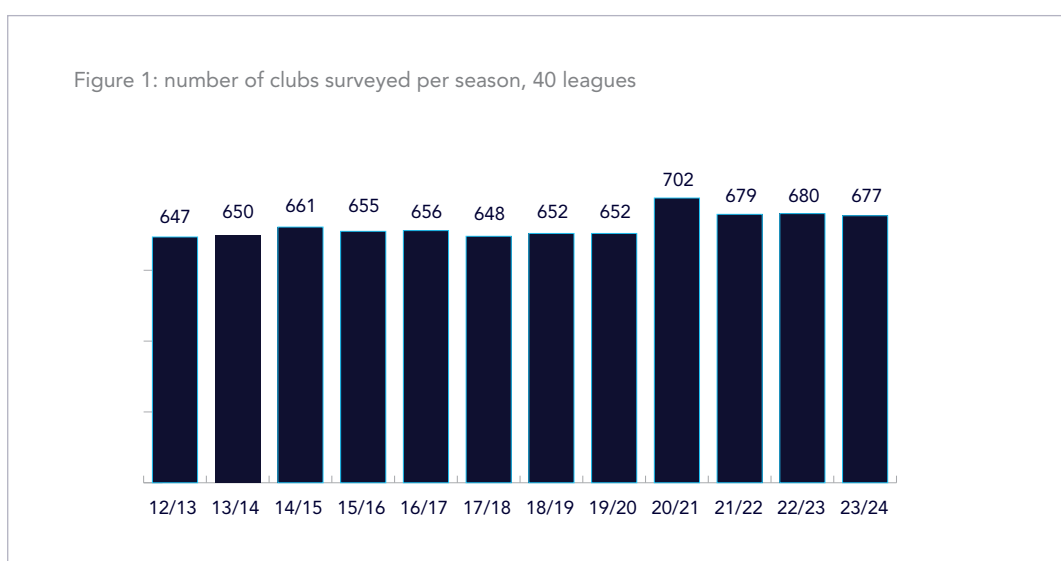
Table 1: Leagues surveyed

Argentina	Primera División	Paraguay	Primera División
Australia	A-League Men	Poland	Ekstraklasa
Austria	Bundesliga	Portugal	Primeira Liga
Belgium	Pro League	Qatar	Stars League
Brazil	Brasileirão	Romania	Liga I
Colombia	Dimayor	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Pro League
Costa Rica	Primera División	Scotland	Premiership
Czech Republic	Czech Liga	Serbia	Super Liga
Denmark	Superliga	South Africa	PSL
Ecuador	Liga Pro	South Korea	K League 1
England	Premier League	Spain	La Liga
France	Ligue 1	Sweden	Allsvenskan
Germany	Bundesliga	Switzerland	Super League
Greece	Super League 1	The Netherlands	Eredivisie
Israel	Ligat Ha'al	Tunisia	Ligue 1
Italy	Serie A	Turkey	Süper Lig
Japan	J1 League	Ukraine	Premier League
Latvia	Vīrsliga	United Arab Emirates	UAE Pro League
Mexico	Liga MX	USA	MLS
Norway	Eliteserien	Uzbekistan	Super League

REPORT 2: MATCH SCHEDULE PER CLUB - A GLOBAL ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

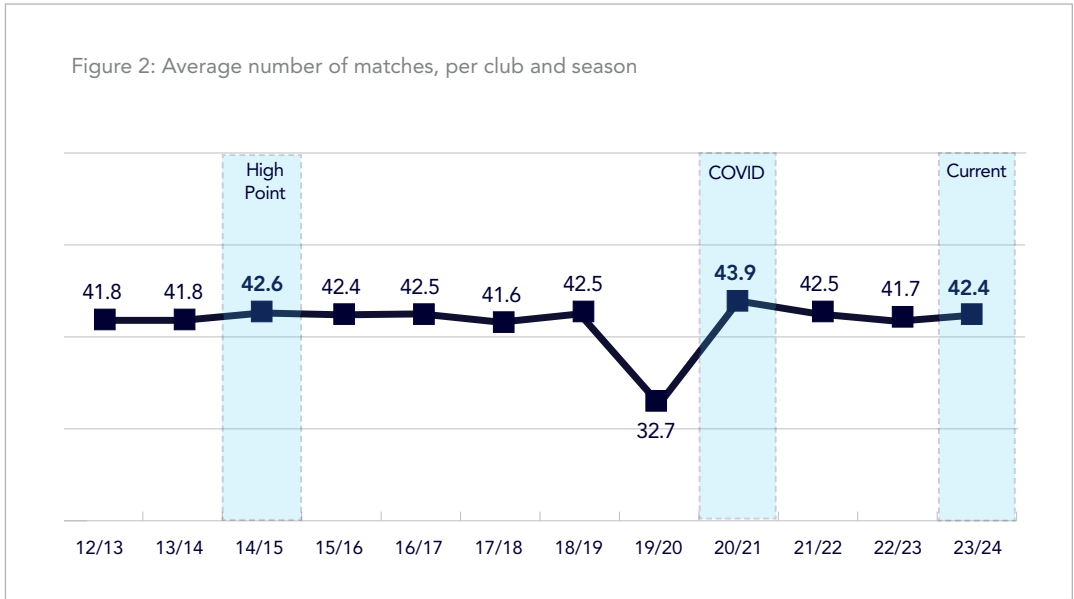
The second report of the CIES Football Observatory Summer Series on Match Calendar and Player Workload analyses the trends in the number of official games played by clubs in 40 leagues from five confederations (list annexed) between the twelve-season period from 2012/13 (since July 1st) to 2023/24 (until June 30th), with a specific analysis for the most competitive big-5 league clubs since 2000. As in the first report, we focus on the breakdown of matches played by clubs (not including friendlies apart for a specific analysis of FIFA Club World Cup winners) according to the organiser (leagues, associations, confederations and FIFA), and then project data for the period 2024-2028, taking into account the planned changes to the format of certain competitions at both domestic and international level. In total, the sample includes 1,103 clubs that participated in at least one season of the championships analysed. The average number of teams per season over the entire period analysed is about 663, with an increase after the pandemic, which reflects the enlargement of some of the domestic leagues surveyed (notably the MLS in the United States and Canada as well as the top Argentinean division).



HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Trends 2012-2024

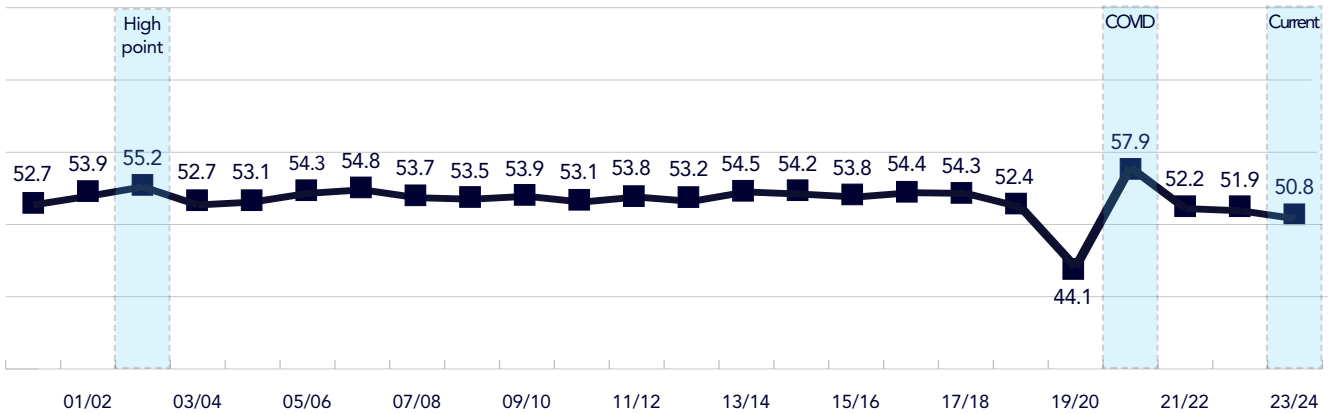
On a seasonal average over the twelve years analysed, the clubs surveyed played 41.5 official matches (not including friendlies). The record low (32.7 games) was recorded in 2019/20, when many competitions had to be cancelled or postponed due to the health crisis, while a maximum of 43.9 matches was observed the following season. Apart from these cyclical variations, no lasting changes were recorded during the period under review.



UEFA Champions League participants 2000-2024

The analysis of the average number of official matches per season for the five major European leagues' representatives in the Champions League since the 2000/01 season shows that the number of fixtures is relatively stable, or even slightly down, which runs counter to the popular belief that the match calendar is becoming more and more crowded for the top clubs.

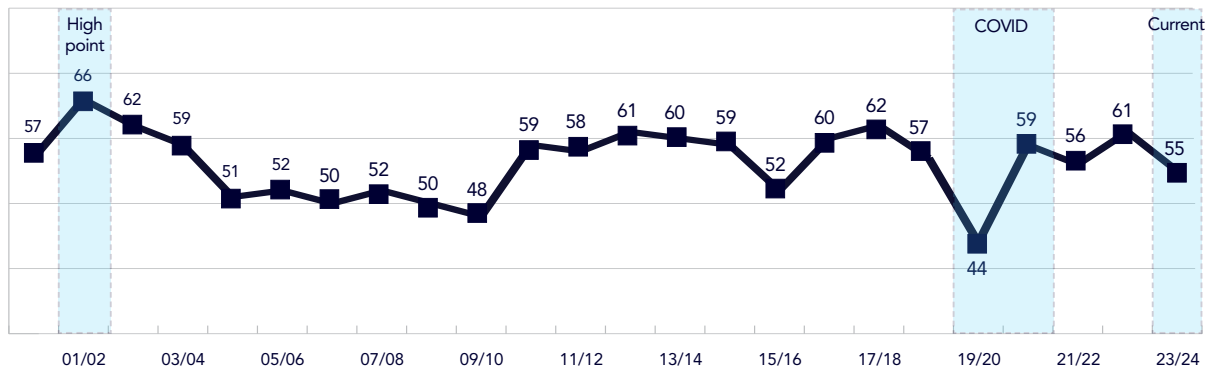
Figure 3: Average number of matches, UEFA Champions League participants



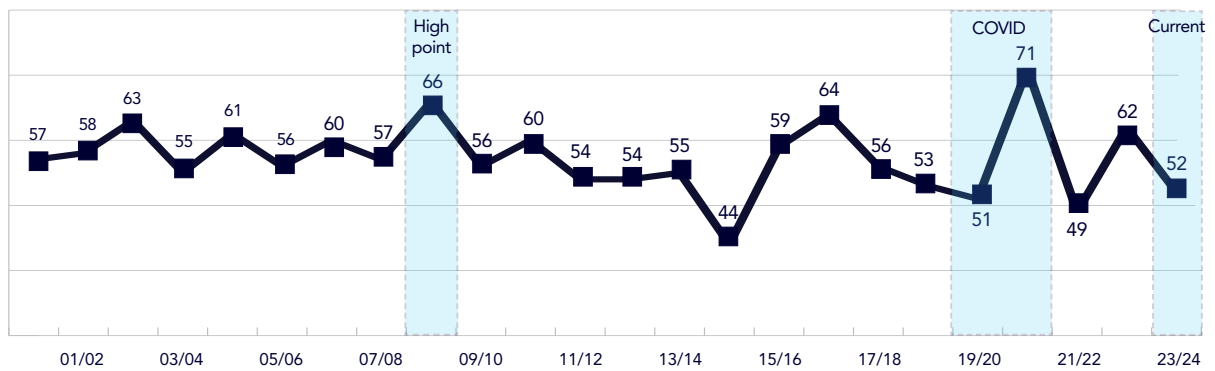
The specific analysis on the number of official matches for three of the most successful and popular clubs worldwide, Real Madrid, Manchester United and Bayern Munich shows that in all three cases the record number of matches in a season dates from the decade between 2000 and 2010: 66 matches in 2001/02 for Real Madrid, 66 matches in 2008/09 for Manchester United and 57 matches in 2007/08 for Bayern Munich.

Figure 4: Number of official matches per season

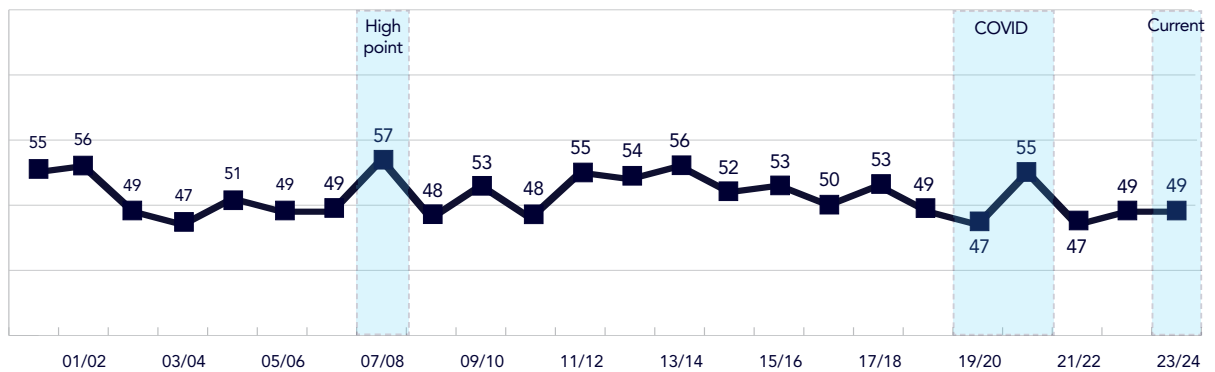
a) Real Madrid



b) Manchester United

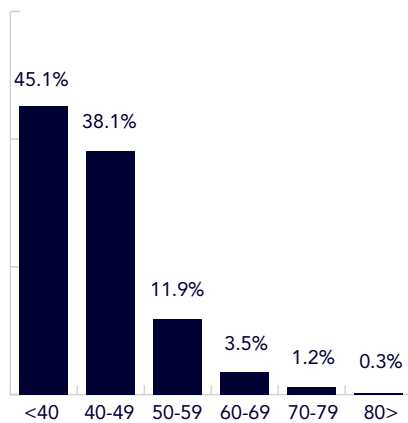


c) Bayern Munich



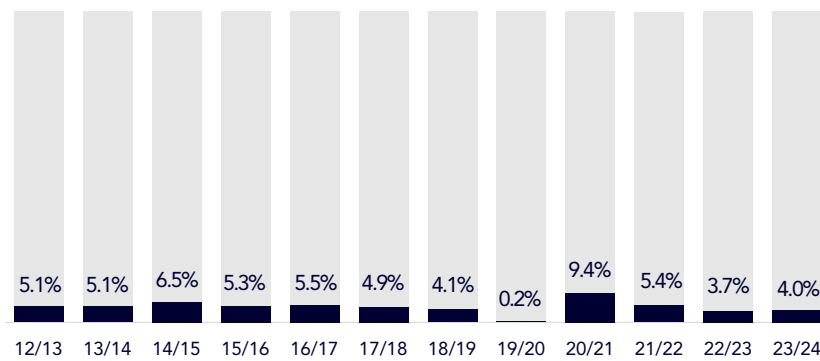
Almost half of the clubs analysed played fewer than 40 official fixtures per season over the twelve years under review (45.1%). This proportion exceeds 80% for teams that contested a maximum of 50 matches. In contrast, only 5.0% of the clubs studied (33 per season on average) played at least 60 official games per season. As with the players (see first report), the proportion of clubs with a high level of activity is relatively low.

Figure 5: Percentage of clubs, per number of matches per season



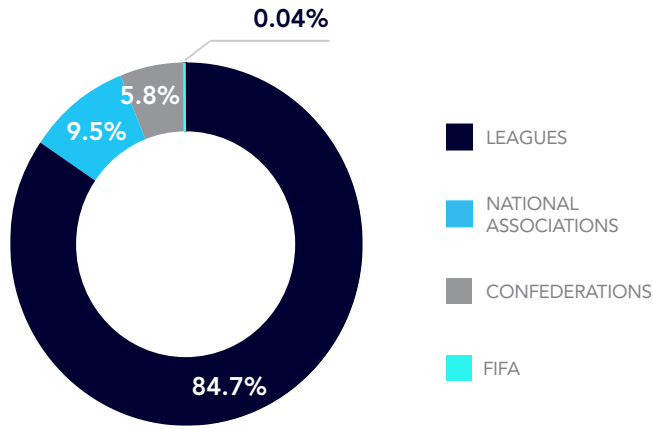
No significant change was observed in the proportion of clubs having played 60 or more matches per season over the twelve seasons analysed. A record percentage (9.4%) was registered in the 2020/21 post-COVID season as a result of the catch-up effect on matches postponed in 2019/20. The values measured for the last two seasons (3.7% for 2022/23 and 4.0% for 2023/24) are even lower than the average recorded over the entire period (5.0%).

Figure 6: Percentage of clubs with more than 60 matches per season



Of the 330,748 official matches played by the teams in our sample between July 2012 and June 2024, 84.7% were organised by national leagues. The proportions for the other categories of organiser are much lower: 9.5% for associations, 5.8% for confederations and 0.04% for FIFA. These figures clearly show the dominant role played by national leagues in the organisation of men's club football worldwide.

Figure 7: Percentage of matches, per organiser

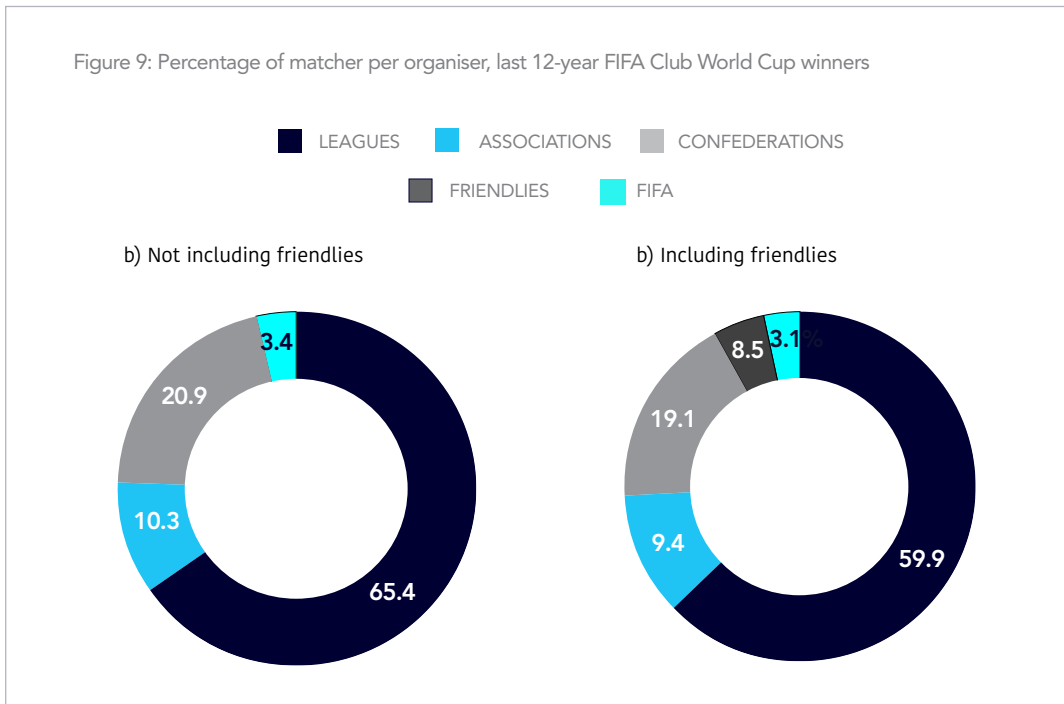


The analysis of the evolution of the share of matches per organiser over the twelve seasons analysed shows a relatively stable balance between each of them. The main change is the decline in the relative weight of associations (-1.8% of matches between 2012/13 and 2023/24) to the benefit of confederations (+0.7%) and leagues (+1.1%). The percentage of fixtures organised by FIFA at club level never exceeded 0.07%.

Figure 8: Percentage of matches in competitions, per organiser and season

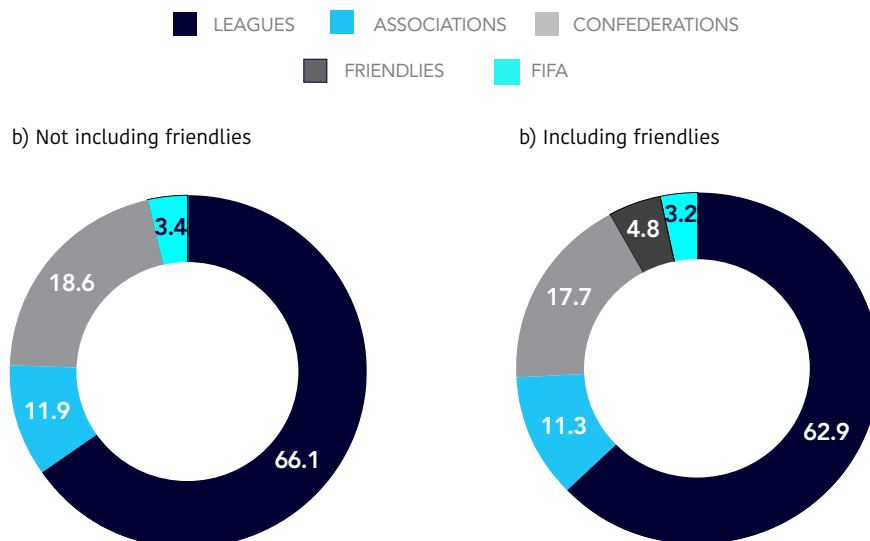
	Leagues	Associations	Confederations	FIFA
12/13	84.0%	10.2%	5.7%	0.04%
13/14	84.4%	9.8%	5.7%	0.02%
14/15	84.0%	10.6%	5.4%	0.03%
15/16	84.0%	10.2%	5.7%	0.04%
16/17	84.2%	10.0%	5.7%	0.05%
17/18	85.0%	9.4%	5.5%	0.05%
18/19	84.3%	9.8%	5.8%	0.05%
19/20	84.4%	9.6%	5.9%	0.07%
20/21	86.6%	7.9%	5.4%	0.04%
21/22	84.8%	8.9%	6.2%	0.04%
22/23	85.7%	8.7%	5.5%	0.03%
23/24	85.1%	8.4%	6.4%	0.03%

The national leagues are the main organisers of matches also for the most active teams at international level. An analysis of the distribution of fixtures played by FIFA Club World Cup winners in the season in which they lifted the trophy shows that almost two-thirds of their matches were organised by a league. This proportion is almost 60% also by including friendly matches organised by the clubs themselves or private organisers. Friendlies accounted for no less than 8.5% of all matches, almost as much as for associations (9.4%) and much more than for FIFA (3.1%).



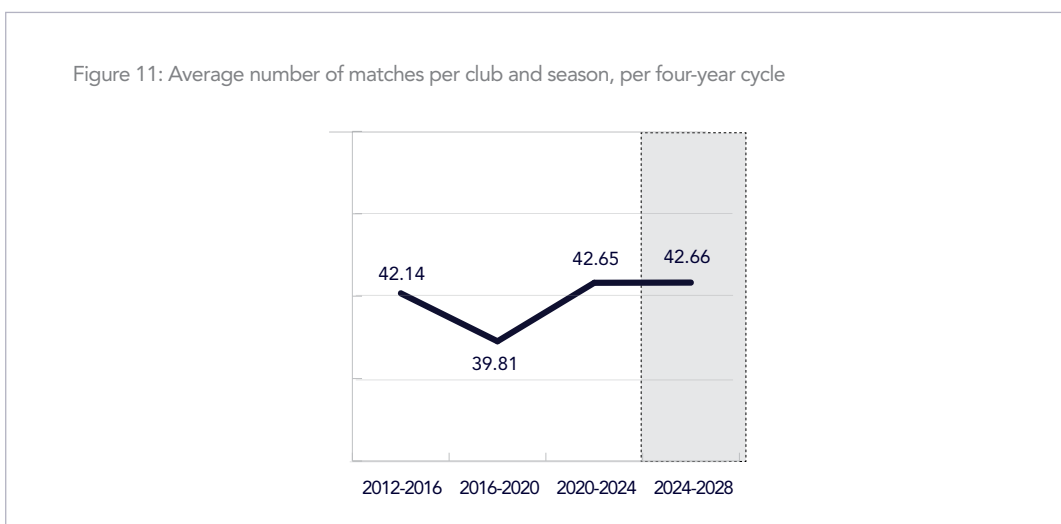
The same analysis was carried out for the most recent FIFA Club World Cup winner, Manchester City. In the season just ended, the English side played 66.1% of their official matches in competitions organised by the league. This percentage is 62.9% if friendly matches are also factored in, with the latter accounting for 4.8% of the total number of games played by Manchester City between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024.

Figure 10: Percentage of matches per organiser, Manchester City (2023/2024)



PROJECTIONS 2024-2028

With regard to the projection for the next four years, considering the most recent data and the changes made or planned in the format of certain competitions, without any new major modifications, the average number of official matches played per club per season will remain stable compared to the figures recorded during the 2020- 2024 cycle



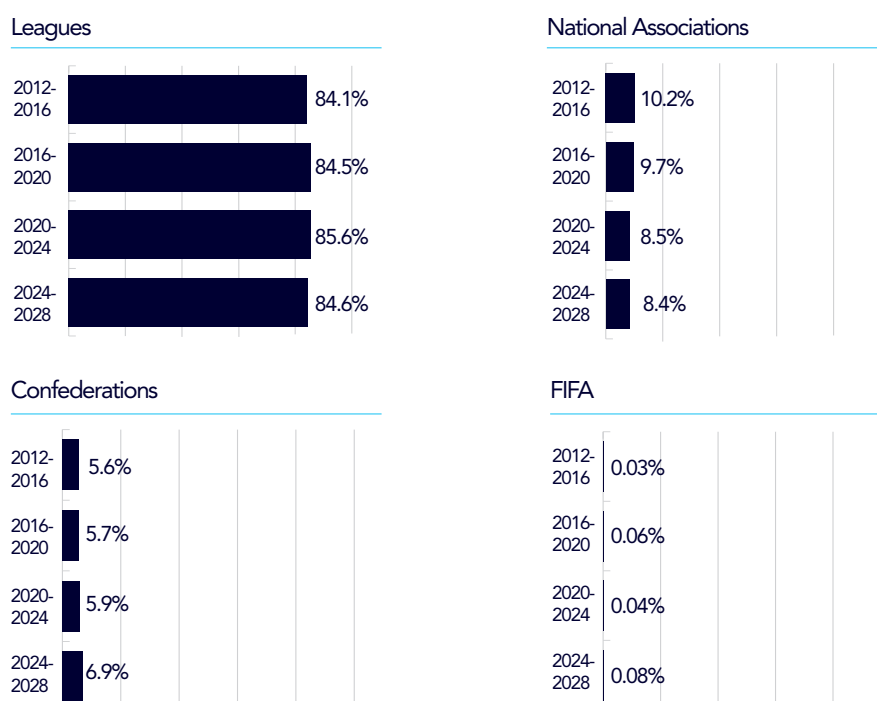
With no further decline in the balance of the competitions, the proportion of teams playing more than 70 or 80 matches per season will also remain stable over the next four years. The main change will be for clubs playing between 60 and 69 games (+0.8%) and between 50 and 59 fixtures (+0.4%), to the detriment of those playing between 40 and 49 matches (-1.3%).

Figure 12: Percentage of clubs per number of matches per season, per four-year cycle

	<40	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80>
2012-2016	43.3%	40.0%	11.3%	3.9%	1.5%	0.1%
2020-2024	51.8%	34.9%	9.7%	2.8%	0.7%	0.2%
2020-2024	40.2%	39.5%	14.6%	3.9%	1.2%	0.6%
2024-2028	40.1%	38.2%	15.0%	4.7%	1.3%	0.6%

Figure 13 shows the projected changes in the percentage of matches by type of organiser for the period 2024-2028 compared with the previous three four-year cycles. The national leagues will continue to play a dominant role in the organisation of men's world football, with an increase in the relative weight of the confederations (+1.05% to 6.95%), and FIFA, whose weight will nevertheless remain below 0.1% (0.08%).

Figure 13: Percentage of matches by competition organisers, per four-year cycle



CONCLUSION

No significant change in the number of official matches played by clubs in the 40 leagues analysed was recorded between 2012 and 2024. The same finding holds also true for the big-5 leagues' representatives in the UEFA Champions League since the 2000/01 season, with even a slight decrease in this case. Not including friendlies, the average number of fixtures per club and season is stable at just over 40 overall, and at just over 50 for the most competitive European teams. Globally, only around 5% of clubs play 60 or more games per season, with record values measured in Brazil and Colombia. Apart from 2020/21, when many of the matches postponed in the previous season due to the pandemic were finally played, the record for the number of games by a club outside Brazil and Colombia has been held by Chelsea since 2012/13: 69 official fixtures. According to our projections, the main change for the next four-year cycle will be the relative increase in the number of teams playing between 50 and 69 official matches per season (+1.6% to 19.7% of total clubs). However, no major changes are expected for clubs playing at least 70 official games per season, their share remaining stable at less than 2% of the total number of teams.

Table 1: Leagues surveyed

Argentina	Primera División	Paraguay	Primera División
Australia	A-League Men	Poland	Ekstraklasa
Austria	Bundesliga	Portugal	Primeira Liga
Belgium	Pro League	Qatar	Stars League
Brazil	Brasileirão	Romania	Liga I
Colombia	Dimayor	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Pro League
Costa Rica	Primera División	Scotland	Premiership
Czech Republic	Czech Liga	Serbia	Super Liga
Denmark	Superliga	South Africa	PSL
Ecuador	Liga Pro	South Korea	K League 1
England	Premier League	Spain	La Liga
France	Ligue 1	Sweden	Allsvenskan
Germany	Bundesliga	Switzerland	Super League
Greece	Super League 1	The Netherlands	Eredivisie
Israel	Ligat Ha'al	Tunisia	Ligue 1
Italy	Serie A	Turkey	Süper Lig
Japan	J1 League	Ukraine	Premier League
Latvia	Virsliga	United Arab Emirates	UAE Pro League
Mexico	Liga MX	USA	MLS
Norway	Eliteserien	Uzbekistan	Super League

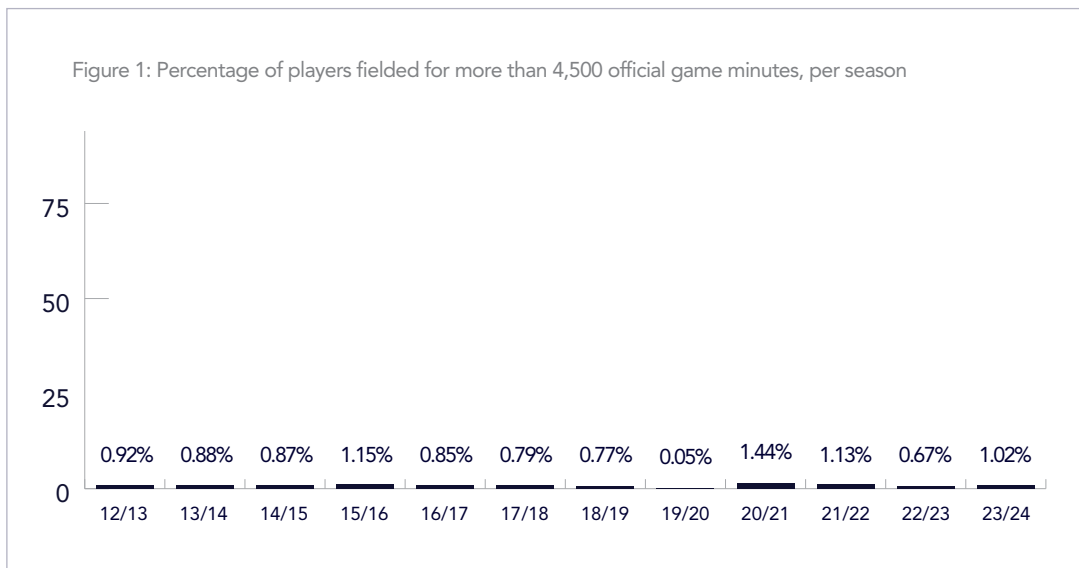
REPORT 3: PLAYERS MOST IN-DEMAND: CURRENT STATS & TRENDS

INTRODUCTION

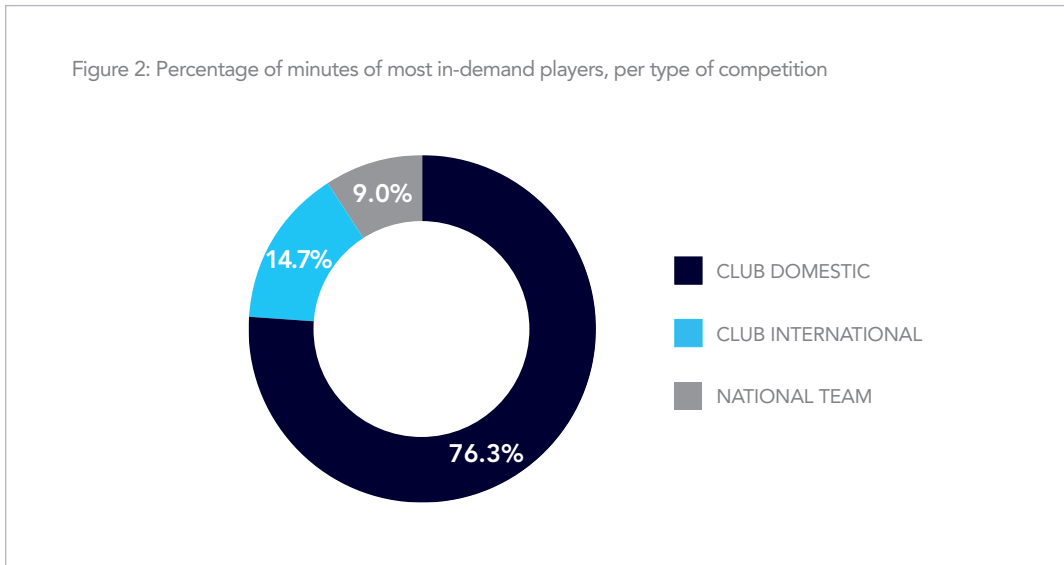
The third report of the CIES Football Observatory Summer Series on Match Calendar and Player Workload in men’s professional football focuses on the most in-demand footballers. For each of the twelve seasons surveyed (2012/13 to 2023/24), the latter are defined as those who have played more than 4500 official game minutes (equivalent to 50 full matches). As in the first two reports, the sample is made up of players from 40 of the world’s top leagues from five confederations (list in annex). The analysis covers both the individual characteristics of the players most in demand and the type of matches played (national club, international club and national teams). This study is complemented by an analysis of back-to-back matches, defined as fixtures with at most 72 hours between kick-offs, highlighting the breakdown per organiser (national leagues, national associations, confederations and FIFA). Finally, we project data on the evolution in the number of footballers who will play more than 4500 official game minutes (not including friendlies) per season over the period 2024/25-2027/28, considering the changes already planned in the format of certain competitions (both at club and national team level). This analysis is also complemented by that of the projected changes in breakdown of minutes per organiser.

ANALYSIS 2012-2024

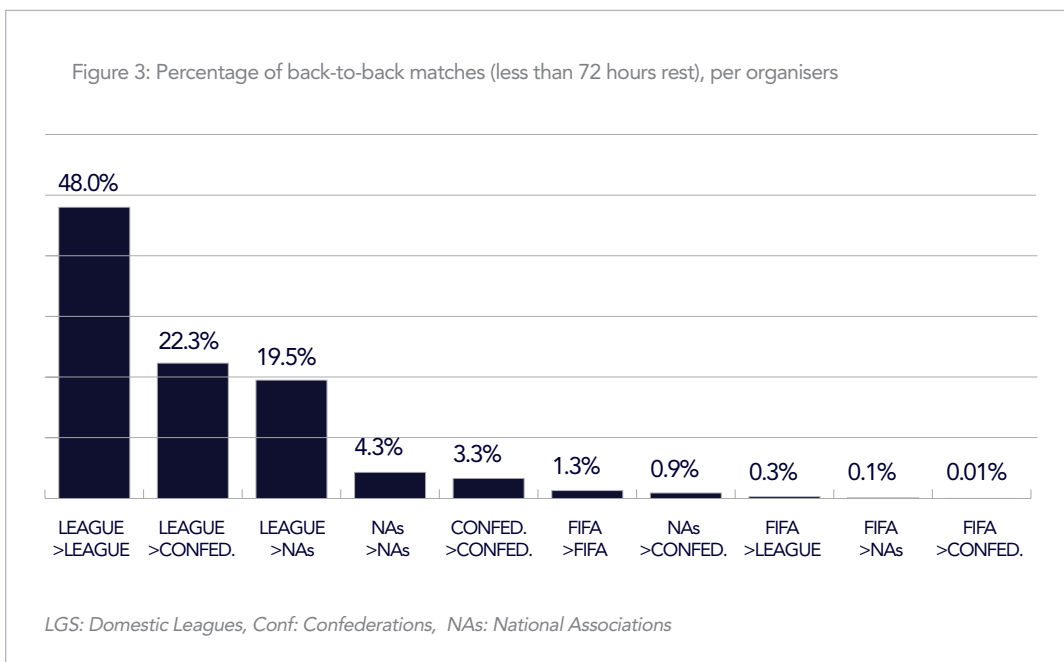
In total, the sample surveyed includes 62156 footballers who participated in matches of the 40 domestic leagues analysed between 2012/13 and 2023/24 (from 1st July to 30 June of the following year), with the average per season over the entire period being 18932 players. Between 2012 and 2024, as a seasonal average, only 0.88 % of the players in the 40 leagues worldwide analysed played more than 4500 official game minutes per year (169 footballers per season). Apart from the seasons impacted by the health crisis, the values remained quite stable throughout the period studied.



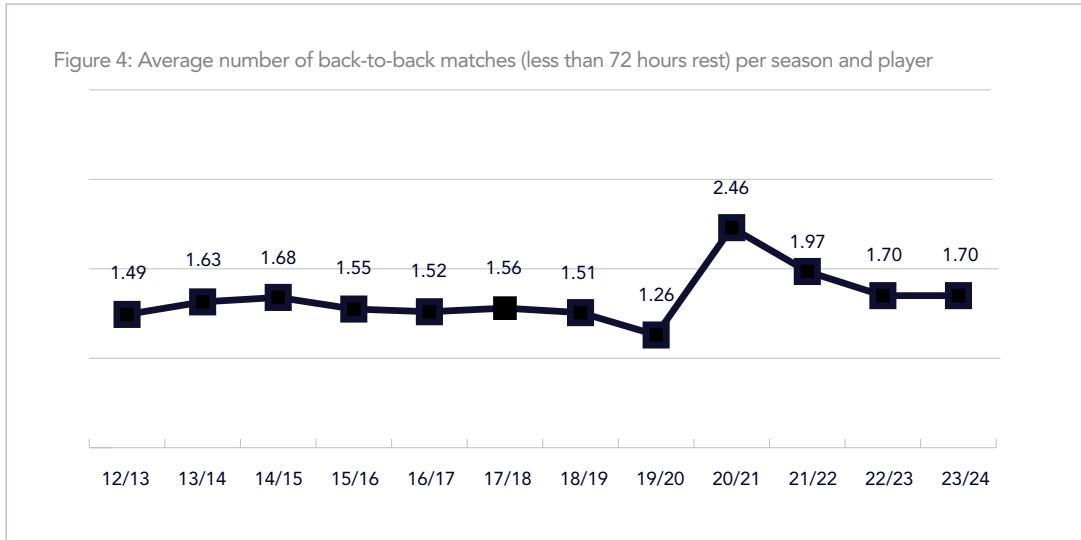
Over three quarters of the playing time of footballers who were fielded for more than 4500 minutes per season during a give one of the twelve studied have been in domestic club competitions: 76.3%. The proportion of minutes played in international club competitions is 14.7%, while that played in national team competitions (A-teams, as well as U20/U21/U23s) is only 9.0%.



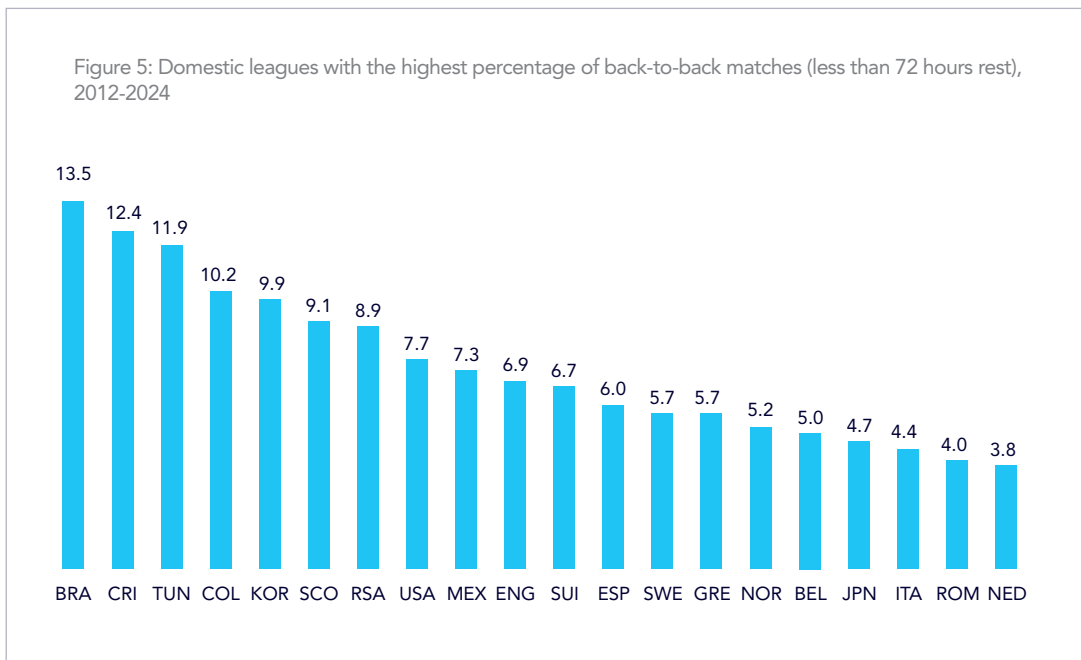
Almost half of the matches played by all footballers in the sample analysed with less than 72 hours between kickoffs were organised by national leagues (48.0%). The two other most frequent situations of back-to-back matches are combinations of fixtures organised by leagues and confederations (22.3%), as well as by leagues and associations (19.5%). Leagues are thus involved in almost nine matches played at close time intervals out of ten.



If we look at the average number of matches per season and footballer played in an interval of 72 hours or less, we find out that this type of situation is relatively rare. On average, a footballer only plays 1.68 matches per season in an interval of 72 hours or less between the kick-offs. After the very busy 2020/21 season, the values are at a level very close to the general average (1.70).

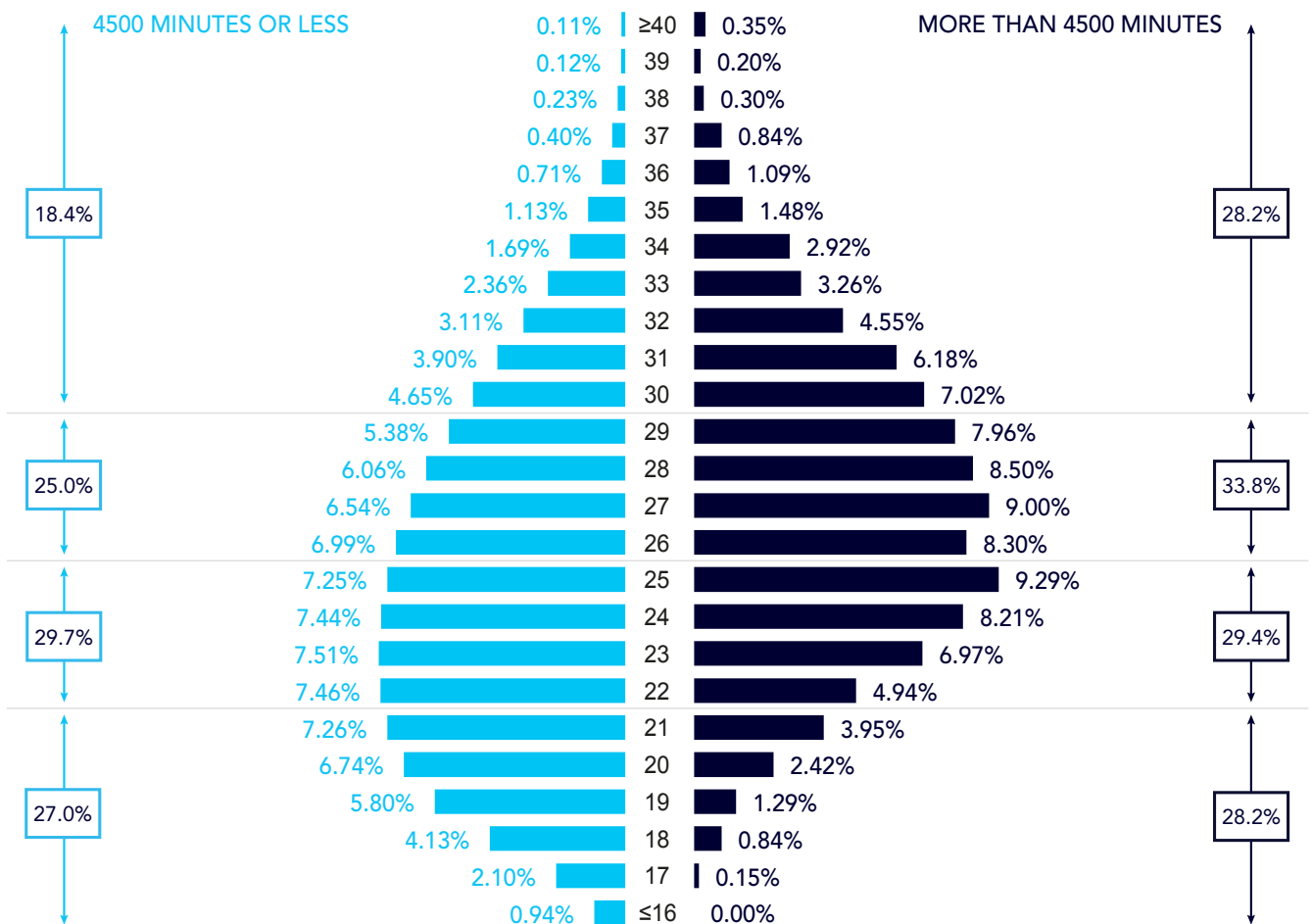


Within the top 40 divisions studied, the highest proportion of matches scheduled up to 72 hours apart was recorded in Brazil, where no fewer than 13.5% of fixtures over the twelve-season period studied were played at short intervals. This proportion also exceeds one tenth in Costa Rica, Tunisia and Colombia. With regard to UEFA associations' leagues, Scotland (9.1% of back-to-back matches) is ahead of another British country, England (6.9%).



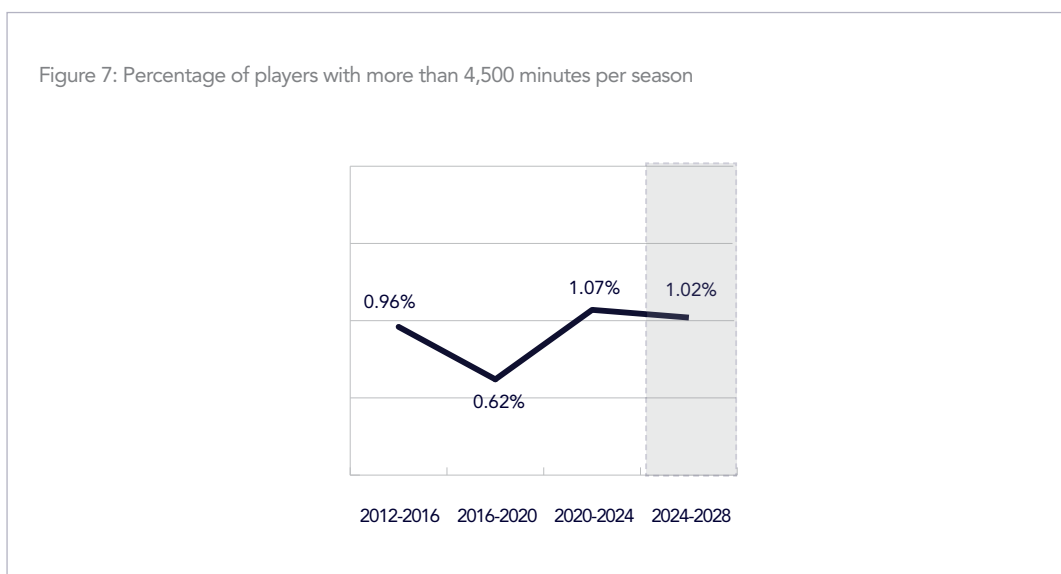
The 1188 footballers who played more than 4500 minutes in official matches per season at least once during the twelve-year period surveyed were significantly older during the season in question than the 60,968 other footballers in our sample: on average 27.6 years compared to 25.4 years. The comparison of the age pyramids between footballers who were fielded for more than 4500 minutes and those who have not during the seasons surveyed confirms the over-representation of the former in the older age categories.

Figure 6: Age pyramid, players with more than 4,500 minutes per season versus other players



PROJECTIONS 2024-2028

This section presents the findings on the number and percentage of footballers who will play more than 4500 official game minutes per season over the next four years, taking into consideration recent or already planned changes in the format of some competitions, both at club and national team level, as well as recent trends in squad turnover, substitutions and competitive balance. During the four-year cycle between 2024 and 2028, the proportion of footballers active in the 40 leagues studied playing more than 4500 official game minutes all competitions combined (not including club friendlies) per season will be slightly lower than that measured over the previous four years (2020-2024): 1.02% compared with 1.07% for the above-mentioned reasons despite expanded formats for some competitions.



There will also not be any significant change in the distribution of the games played by the most frequently used footballers by type of organiser. Although slightly less dominant (-3.2%), national leagues will continue to organise over 60% of their matches (61.5%), followed by confederations (22.6%, +3.5%), national associations (12.4%, -0.7%) and FIFA (3.4%, +0.3%).

Figure 8: Minutes breakdown of most in-demand players (more than 4,500 minutes), per four-year cycle and organiser.

a) Leagues

	National Teams	Clubs	Total	
2012-2016	-	61.9%	61.9%	
2016-2020	-	61.9%	61.9%	
2020-2024	-	64.7%	64.7%	
2024-2028	-	61.5%	61.5%	

b) Associations

	National Teams	Clubs	Total	
2012-2016	3.3%	15.2%	18.5%	
2016-2020	2.3%	13.8%	16.1%	
2020-2024	1.7%	11.4%	13.1%	
2024-2028	1.8%	10.6%	12.4%	

c) Confederations

	National Teams	Clubs	Total	
2012-2016	2.5%	14.0%	16.5%	
2016-2020	2.3%	15.9%	18.2%	
2020-2024	4.9%	14.2%	19.1%	
2024-2028	5.1%	17.5%	22.6%	

d) FIFA

	National Teams	Clubs	Total	
2012-2016	2.9%	0.2%	3.1%	
2016-2020	3.6%	0.2%	3.8%	
2020-2024	3.0%	0.1%	3.1%	
2024-2028	3.1%	0.3%	3.4%	

CONCLUSIONS

Between 2012 and 2024, as a seasonal average, only 0.88% of all footballers from the 40 leagues surveyed played more than 4500 minutes in official matches per year, with stable values through the period. This corresponds to an annual average of around 169 footballers. On average, players surveyed only participated in 1.68 matches per season in an interval of 72 hours at most between kick-offs. Half of these games were domestic leagues' successive fixtures. Overall, national leagues are involved in nine back-to-back matches out of ten.

The greatest share of minutes played by footballers fielded for more than 4500 minutes in official matches per season was registered at domestic club competitions' level: 76.3% of their playing time. The proportion of matches played in international club competitions is 14.7%, while that played in national team competitions (A-teams, as well as U20, U21 and U23s) is only 9.0%. The projections elaborated for the 2024-2028 four-year cycle taking into consideration recent changes in competition formats, squad turnover, substitutions and competitive balance indicate that the proportion of footballers active in the 40 leagues studied playing more than 4500 official game minutes all competitions combined per season will be comparable to that measured over the previous four years (2020-2024).

Table 1: Leagues surveyed

Argentina	Primera División	Paraguay	Primera División
Australia	A-League Men	Poland	Ekstraklasa
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