

AT THE LIMIT

PLAYER WORKLOAD IN
ELITE PROFESSIONAL
MEN'S FOOTBALL

 fifpro.org
 info@fifpro.org
 +31 23 554 6970
 Scorpis 161
2132 LR Hoofddorp
The Netherlands


FIFPRO
FOOTBALL
PLAYERS
WORLDWIDE


FIFPRO

A photograph of two football managers, Jurgen Klopp and Pep Guardiola, standing together on a football pitch. Jurgen Klopp is on the left, wearing a dark jacket and a Liverpool FC cap, smiling. Pep Guardiola is on the right, wearing a dark jacket and a white shirt with a tie, also smiling. The background is a blurred crowd of spectators in a stadium.

IF WE DON'T LEARN TO DEAL WITH OUR PLAYERS IN A BETTER WAY, COMPETITION-WISE... WE WILL KILL THE BEAUTIFUL GAME. **WITHOUT THE PLAYER, THE GAME IS NOT A GOOD ONE.**

Jurgen Klopp, Press Conference,
Liverpool FC v. Wolverhampton Wanderers, 10/05/19

IT'S A CRAZY SCHEDULE AND IT IS GOING TO KILL OUR PLAYERS! WE CANNOT SUSTAIN THAT FOR A LONG TIME (...) THEY HAVE TO BREATHE AND REST TO PERFORM BETTER IN TOURNAMENTS. **THEY HAVE TO REST!**

Pep Guardiola, Press Conference,
Manchester City FC Pre-season Tour of Asia, 23/07/19



ABOUT THE REPORT

WELCOME TO THE FIFPRO REPORT ON PLAYER WORKLOAD IN ELITE PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL.

This report provides players' perspectives of their workload from club and country duties. The report builds on previous FIFPRO medical reports and player surveys. Additional scientific findings concerning the exposure of players to excessive workload and insufficient rest is also taken into account.

Our industry's evolution has been accelerating and so have competition reforms. As a consequence of these reforms the international match calendar has become denser. The game is faster, more physical and more global than ever. Although the demands on players are increasing, their physical and psychological capacity has natural limits.

This puts not only their health and therefore career prospects at risk but threatens to diminish their peak sporting performance and as a result the quality of competitions. Our research focuses on football's fast-changing competition landscape from an elite player's perspective - those who compete at an international level for their club and national team - and formulates key policies and regulatory responses based on health and safety concerns. Our objective is to protect players and to safeguard sporting excellence. The report uses a number of player case studies to showcase how competition calendars and travel requirements clash with scientific best practice, leaving some elite players on the limit of their mental and physical capacity.

INFORM

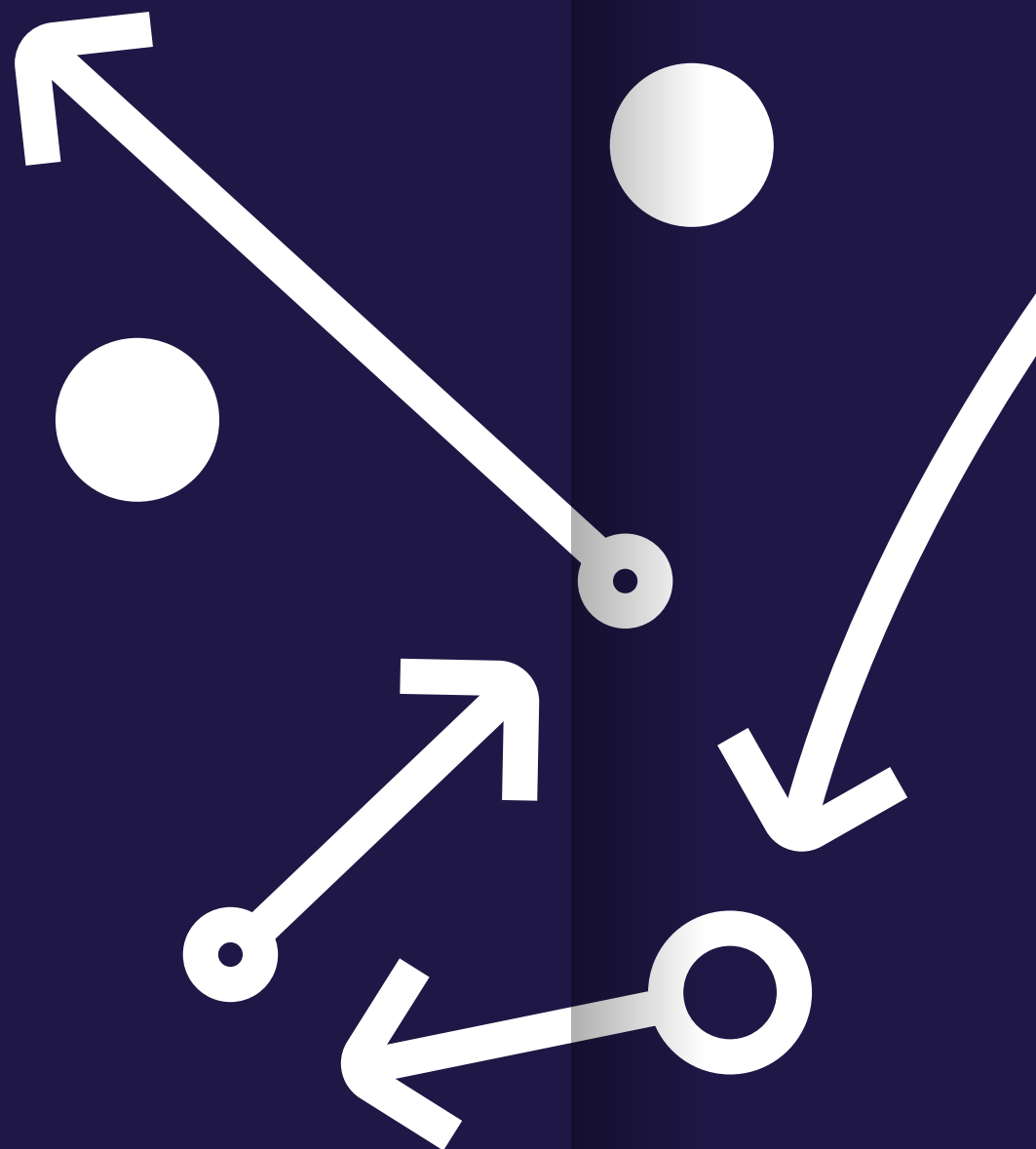
Factual, evidence-based and player-centred policy development to safeguard the rights and interests of professionals at the heart of the game.

ENGAGE

Provide the industry, policy makers, influencers and media with trustworthy analyses and proposals about the workload of elite players in an evolving competition landscape for professional football players worldwide.

EMPOWER

Players are central to the evolution of football and are needed to shape the international match calendar and design of club and national competitions.



AT THE LIMIT

PLAYER WORKLOAD IN ELITE PROFESSIONAL MEN'S FOOTBALL

CONTENTS

- 04** WELCOME
- 07** TOP FINDINGS
- 08** RECOMMENDATIONS
- 10** THE OVERLOAD OF ELITE PLAYERS
- 12** THE EXPOSURE OF ELITE PLAYERS
- 14** PLAYER WORKLOAD IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL
 - 16** MEDICAL EVIDENCE & GUIDELINES
 - 18** COMPETITION REFORMS & MATCH CALENDARS
 - 21** STATISTICS AND DATA ON PLAYER WORKLOAD
- 36** FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT FIFPRO

FIFPRO - Football Players Worldwide - is the global representative organisation for all professional football players; more than 65.000 football players in total, male and female.

PUTTING PLAYER HEALTH & PERFORMANCE FIRST

PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL IS ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT SECTORS OF THE GLOBAL SPORT & ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY.

It is the players who make our game special, and who captivate millions of people around the world. The findings showcase how professional football must protect its most important actors - the players - for the sake of their health and the game itself.

Welcome to the 2019 report on player workload. There are a limited number of elite athletes whose talents light up our sport. Their careers are short, intense and fragile thus creating a vital responsibility for all stakeholders to protect the short and long-term health of players and to sustain their ability for elite sporting performance.

The report focuses on the experiences of several hundred players at the peak of our sport - those representing their club domestically and internationally, as well as playing for their national team. It showcases how the structural changes in competition formats are impacting the workload of professional players around the world. It provides the player's perspective regarding developing sustainable solutions and cites scientific evidence for appropriate regulatory solutions.

THE IMPACT ON MATCH CALENDARS AND WORKLOAD

Competitions and their formats at national and international level have drastically changed since the inception of professional football, heavily influenced by economic and financial interests. The privatisation and commercialisation of television networks in the 1980s and 1990s accelerated the



transformation of competitions and subsequently increased the players' workload. Today, the workload of professional elite players looks nothing like it did 20 years ago.

As new forces transform our societies, it has become clear that professional football will not remain isolated from these changes. Technological improvements and emerging audiences, on a regional and global scale, create new revenue streams and ultimately accelerate the transformation of the design and format of our competitions. Recent reforms to national team and international club competition formats are testament to this evolution. But as rights holders protect their competitions and strive to reach new audiences, they create challenges not just for the players' workload but also risk inflicting damage to sporting performance.

THE PLAYERS MAKE OUR GAME WHAT IT IS

Moreover, The current match calendar at the top end of professional football increases the risks of damaging a sustainable and healthy career path, impacting sporting excellence. At the same time, thousands of players and hundreds of professional clubs do not have adequate resources to compete in a meaningful way in the international football environment. The drive towards maximum concentration of resources of the top end of the game thus undermines working and playing opportunities across football. While

the top few hundred players in the world are being drained by an overload of competitions, thousands of their colleagues are offered too few playing opportunities to shape a lasting career.

Professional football needs a more sustainable approach. More structural changes to the way competitions are organised are on their way, but safeguards to promote healthy, dynamic and fair career development are still lacking.

PUTTING PLAYERS AND PERFORMANCE FIRST

Governing bodies, leagues, and clubs must place more importance on the protection of players' health and sporting performance during future competitions. Current discussions on the future of competitions need to prioritise a reform of international and domestic match calendars to stress the protection of players' health. First and foremost this requires a mandatory framework to protect players' rest and recovery periods during and after the sporting season. It also requires further scrutiny of fundamental sport and employment rules such as club size and squad selection. Increasing the number of fixtures must be accompanied by safeguards to manage the load for individual players. Most professional team sports other than football have better protections to manager player workload.

THERE ARE MORE AND MORE COMPETITIONS AND GAMES, AND MORE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL STRESS FOR PLAYERS.

RUI PATRÍCIO | PORTUGAL

This report outlines the solutions to the problems it clearly identifies:

- 1 **Develop strong standards** to limit and manage player workload and sporting performance, such as in and off-season breaks, minimum rest periods between matches and mitigation of long-distance travel.
- 2 **Restructure the (international) match calendar**, before developing and adding new fixtures that would further increase player workload.
- 3 **Respect minimum rest and call up periods** before and after matches and tournaments.
- 4 **Develop enforcement mechanisms** to guarantee the harmonised application of player health protection measures.
- 5 **Recognise the joint responsibility and interest** of all international football stakeholders in the protection of players while designing competition formats and match calendars.

Managing competition reforms requires a clear commitment to our players' health and welfare - particularly between competition organisers and player associations.

The findings and recommendations laid out in this report create a platform for open consultation between all stakeholders to create practical and implementable safeguards for players' health and performance.

Theo van Seggelen
FIFPro Secretary General

WE NEED TO MANAGE THE WORKLOAD FOR ALL PLAYERS VERY WELL, AND BALANCE THE NEEDS BETWEEN THE PLAYER, CLUB AND COUNTRY. FOR US TO CONTINUOUSLY PLAY AT OUR BEST AND IMPROVE PERFORMANCE, WE NEED TO BE PROTECTED FROM EXCESSIVE MATCH SCHEDULES.

GIORGIO CHIellini | ITALY

TOP FINDINGS

WHAT THE CURRENT PLAYER WORKLOAD TELLS US ABOUT HEALTH, PERFORMANCE & COMPETITIONS

1 IN EXTREME CASES, PLAYERS PARTICIPATE IN ALMOST 80 GAMES PER YEAR

These players take part in more than double the amount of games than non-international first-division and second-division players.

2 MATCH OVERLOAD AFFECTS MANY ELITE PLAYERS

Many players at an elite level play more than 60 matches per season across multiple competitions. When they do not reach such a high number, it is mainly due to injury, early elimination or non-qualification for a competition.

3 MOST ELITE FOOTBALLERS PLAY WITH LESS THAN 5 DAYS REST

There are ever-increasing competitions and matches for clubs and national teams. Consequently most matches are played with insufficient rest and recovery periods, increasing the risk of injury and shorter careers, for players.

4 SEASON BREAKS AND DETRAINING PERIODS ARE CUT SHORT

The cumulative effect of competitions and a packed match calendar not only cuts rest and recovery periods, but eats into vital season breaks and detraining periods for elite players.

5 ELITE NON-EUROPEANS TRAVEL TOO MUCH, WITHOUT EXTRA REST

Due to the global nature of the game, players cross many time-zones for international matches and do not get the additional rest recommended by medical experts.

6 CONTINUOUS COMPETITION CYCLES ENDANGER CAREERS

Players start their careers at the top international level at an ever younger age and are exposed to continuous periods of match overload. Within a World Cup cycle some players will have no real off-season break.

7 COMPETING INTERESTS HAVE LED TO A FRAGMENTED CALENDAR

Economic interests and multiple competition formats lead to a fragmented match landscape. The non-alignment of competition organisers, and the increasing appetite for elite football is creating an environment which puts players health and performance at risk.

8 NO STAKEHOLDER CAN IMPROVE THE CALENDAR ALONE

The risk for players and competitions is serious. The complexity requires a wholistic approach in which each football stakeholder must contribute to creating a better playing environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT THE FOOTBALL INDUSTRY CAN DO TO PUT PLAYER HEALTH & PERFORMANCE FIRST

1 LOCK IN SEASON BREAKS

All professional players need to rest physically and mentally during the summer and winter breaks to be in the best physical condition to play. Minimal mandatory seasonal breaks (four weeks in the summer, two weeks in the winter) should be locked into the calendar.

2 LIMIT BACK-TO-BACK GAMES

Players need at least 5 days between high-intensity games to perform at their best during a season and to manage injury risk. While it is unavoidable to schedule back-to-back matches, a limit on the amount of these played with less than five days of rest should be introduced.

3 CONSIDER MATCH CAPS

A match cap could be introduced to help players avoid excesses and handle the pressure a packed calendar puts on their body and mind. However, if the recommended rest and detraining periods are respected, a hard cap might not be necessary.

4 THE PLAYING CALENDAR

The amount of games played should be considered individually not per squad. Increasing match numbers should mean spreading the games amongst more players, giving the chance for others to have playing time. Increasing squad sizes for this purpose could facilitate more flexible and innovative competition designs.

5 MORE REST FOR LONG-HAUL TRAVEL

A minimum rest period for long distance travellers with their national and club teams should be introduced. In addition the number of cross continental trips should be reduced. 63% of national team players say that long-distance travel impacts their performance.

6 DEVELOP AN EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

The match load of players should be monitored by developing an early warning system. This system would help players, teams and competition organisers with forward planning. It would also help to track minimum regulatory requirements for rest and recovery.

7 NO ADDITIONAL GAMES BEFORE PLAYER SAFEGUARDS ARE IN PLACE

There should be no additional matches added to competition calendars at national and international levels before enforceable mechanisms to protect players have been implemented.

PUT A CAP ON HOW MUCH PLAYERS CAN BE USED, AND YOU CAN PLAY AS MANY GAMES AS YOU WANT, BECAUSE THE PLAYERS WILL HAVE COMPULSORY AMOUNTS OF REST.

PLAYER CASE STUDY

THE OVERLOAD OF ELITE PLAYERS

GLOBAL ELITE PLAYERS ARE FACED WITH SEVERE MATCH OVERLOAD WHICH THREATENS NOT ONLY THEIR SPORTING PERFORMANCE BUT ALSO THEIR HEALTH AND SUSTAINABLE CAREER PATHS. THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES HIGHLIGHT THE TOTAL GAMES PLAYED, THE REST AND RECOVERY PERIODS THROUGHOUT THE SEASON, THE SEASON BREAKS PROVIDED AND THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF KILOMETRES FLOWN BY LONG-DISTANCE TRAVELLERS.

The South Korean forward played a total of 78 games for his club and country, more than anyone else in our sample.

The Tottenham Hotspur forward played in the World Cup, the Asian Games and in the Asian Cup this year, playing 25 games with his national team. 56 of these 78 games were played with less than five days of rest, representing 72% of his games. In consequence, he had only 22 days of rest in the summer, he played the Asian Games in Indonesia in August. In the winter, he did not have any detraining period. Son Heung-Min is the biggest traveller of our sample with 110,600km travelled.



HEUNG-MIN SON

SOUTH KOREA, TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR



FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 13 JUNE 2019



***72%** GAMES PLAYED WITH **< 5 DAYS OF REST**



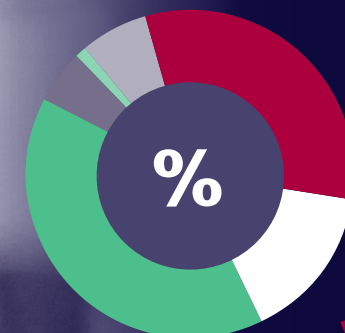
SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION

THE MEDICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- * MINIMUM OF 5 DAYS OF REST BETWEEN GAMES
- * 14 DAYS OF REST IN WINTER
- * FROM 28 TO 42 DAYS OF REST IN SUMMER
- * NUMBER OF LONG FLIGHTS SHOULD BE MINIMISED



- 25 IN NATIONAL TEAM
- 12 IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
- 31 IN PREMIER LEAGUE
- 4 IN EFL CUP
- 1 IN FA CUP
- 5 FRIENDLY CLUB GAMES

110,600km
FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM

PLAYER CASE STUDY
THE EXPOSURE OF ELITE PLAYERS

Global elite players are exposed to a much higher work load than their peers who do not play international competitions for clubs and national teams. The following comparison between Ivan Rakitic and Marcus Thuram highlights the main differences in this respect.

IVAN
RAKITIĆ



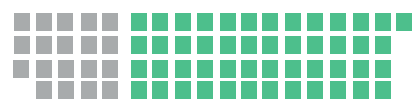
CROATIA, BARCELONA

FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 13 JUNE 2019

With 68 games played this season, Ivan Rakitic has one of the highest numbers in our sample. The Croatian international reached the final of the World Cup and the semi-final of the Champions League with his club Barcelona.

72% (49) of his games were played with less than five days of rest, which may cause deteriorations in the long run to his body. With 14 games with his national team, including seven at the World Cup, Rakitic had a busy season, where he only had 21 days of rest in the summer and seven days in winter. Ivan Rakitic travelled 30,000km with the Croatian national team.

68 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



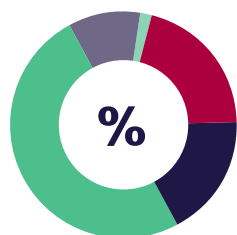
72% GAMES PLAYED WITH
< 5 DAYS OF REST



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



- 14 IN NATIONAL TEAM
- 12 IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
- 34 IN LALIGA
- 7 IN COPA DEL REY
- 1 IN SUPERCOPA

30,000KM
FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM

MARCUS
THURAM



FRANCE, EA GUINGAMP

FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 30 JUNE 2019

In his best season yet, Marcus Thuram played a grand total of 42 games this season: 32 in Ligue 1, 3 in the French Cup, 3 in the League Cup and 4 with the French U21.

These numbers are considerably smaller than the rest of our sample as Thuram did not play any international club games. He played four junior national team games. This shows the important differences between two "professional" worlds.

42 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



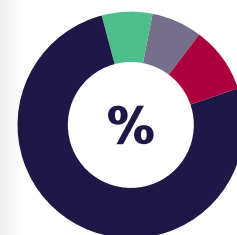
40% GAMES PLAYED WITH
< 5 DAYS OF REST



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



- 4 IN NATIONAL TEAM
- 32 IN LIGUE 1
- 3 IN FRENCH CUP
- 3 IN LEAGUE CLUB

2,000KM
FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM



PLAYER WORKLOAD IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

THE EVIDENCE OF PLAYER
WORKLOAD IN ELITE
FOOTBALL



MEDICAL EVIDENCE AND GUIDELINES

THERE IS NOW A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF MEDICAL EVIDENCE SHOWING A NEED TO DECREASE THE NUMBER OF GAMES THAT INDIVIDUAL PLAYERS ARE PLAYING EACH SEASON. THE KEY ARGUMENTS ARE LINKED TO THE SUSTAINABLE CAREER PATHS OF PLAYERS, INJURY RISKS AND THE QUALITY OF SPORTING PERFORMANCE. THIS IS KEY IN ENSURING THAT PLAYERS, CLUBS, AND FANS GET THE MOST OUT OF EVERY SINGLE GAME.

Professional footballers can only reach their full potential when they are in good health, both physically and mentally. Overloading the international match calendar has a substantial negative impact on players' well-being and ultimately on their sporting performance.

REST PERIODS

Medical evidence provides a range of scientific findings that together build a clear framework on how to best address and mitigate player overloading.

BETWEEN MATCHES

Football matches involve frequent, fractionated explosive sprints with a strenuous use of muscles that can induce damage and produce post-match fatigue that lasts up to 72 hours. Therefore, having a congested period with a large number of matches has been correlated with poorer performances and a higher risk of injuries.

This is especially true in the following circumstances:

- 1 **A period of recovery of five days or more** leads to better performances, more matches won and a lesser chance of injury for players.
- 2 **A very short period of recovery between matches – less than 72 hours** – for players is associated with more matches lost for their teams;
- 3 **A short period of recovery between matches – 96 hours or less** – is associated with a higher risk of injury in comparison to a longer period of up to five days;
- 4 **Playing two matches per week, with a 72 to 96 hour recovery time in between**, leads to a higher risk of injury in comparison to playing a single match per week.

BETWEEN LONG-HAUL FLIGHTS

Additional recovery should be given to professional footballers after long flights (over six hours) in order to maintain their health and optimum performance, especially for those exposed to jet-lag (disruption of body clock and daily rhythm) as a consequence of crossing three or more time zones. Considering that the rule of thumb of one additional recovery day for each time-zone crossed cannot be applied within the current congested match calendar, FIFPRO recommends that (i) the number of long flights (especially those inducing jet-lag) is minimised and (ii) minimal travel standards during long flights, e.g. travelling in business class, should be established. Studies have shown that there is an increased risk of Venous Thromboembolism (VET) or Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) also known commonly as the “economy class syndrome” for high-performance athletes travelling long distance by air, in cramped conditions.

IN- AND OFF- SEASON BREAKS

In- and off-season breaks increase players' ability to recover fully during and after a football season. The latter is essential before starting a new season. At the time of writing, there are no official international guidelines available for the optimal duration of in- and off-season breaks but their positive impact has been widely confirmed. These periods of detraining (partial or complete cessation of football activities) need to be long enough to recover and regenerate



I WAS WASTED AFTER 5 YEARS. I DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH REST. BETWEEN THE SCHEDULE OF MY CLUB AND NATIONAL TEAM, I SIMPLY HAD NO WAY OF TAKING A BREAK.

EIJI KAWASHIMA | JAPAN

both physically and mentally. However, these should also never be too long as they may affect player performance and physiological capacities (e.g. endurance or strength).

The absence of such breaks has been shown to affect not only performance but also increase the likelihood of players' injuries. The absence of a winter break, for example, has been associated with a higher injury rate in the following period. Player performance is also negatively affected.

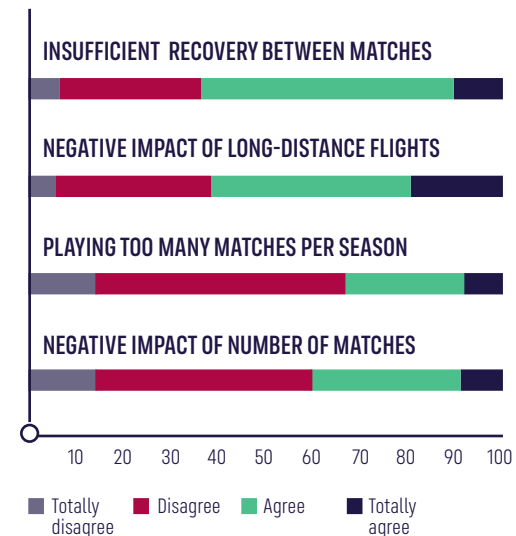
Ideally, medical evidence states that a minimum of four to six weeks of complete rest should be observed in the off-season, and two weeks in the mid-season.

WHAT DO THE PLAYERS THINK?

In 2018, 543 players completed the FIFPRO survey on the International Match Calendar. Of those 543 players, 55% played in their national teams:

- 1 **60% of surveyed players reported that long national and international flights had a negative impact on their recovery.**
- 2 **85% were in favour of an in-season break lasting 14 days.**
- 3 **64% of the players believed they had insufficient rest between matches.**

PERCEPTION OF ELITE PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLERS



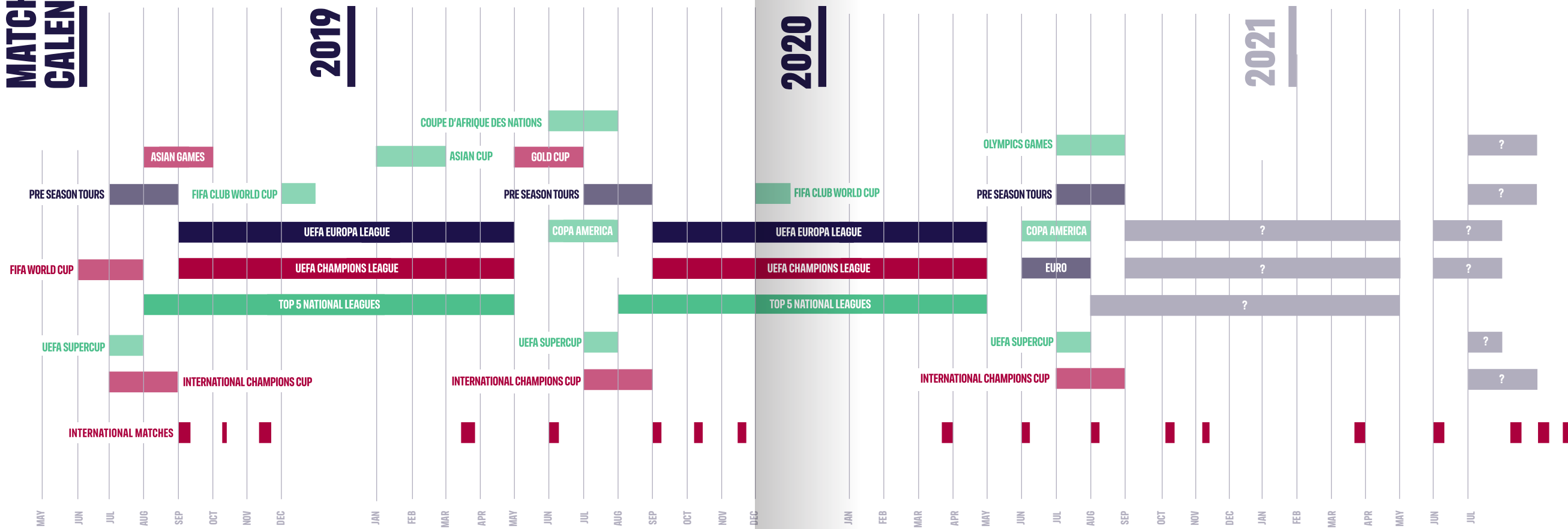
Among players who play between 50 and 60 matches, 50% think that they play too much. While 50 to 60 games could be considered acceptable, one logically concludes that playing almost 80 games, as some of our sample players do, is far too high to be sustainable.

COMPETITIONS REFORMS & MATCH CALENDARS

PLAYERS HAVE A FUNDAMENTAL INTEREST IN THE SPORTING, ECONOMIC AND STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR GAME.

As competitions evolve, players want to discuss and influence the developments relating to the future shape of their working environment. Given the ever-widening economic, financial and sporting inequality in world football, competition design and reforms must be discussed across all levels of the industry to support a healthy environment for all clubs and players.

MATCH CALENDAR



This calendar does not include qualifiers for continental competitions (Club & National Team) and for the World Cup

The current transformations need to be openly debated in a transparent process involving all stakeholders. The future of football competitions and their impact on players' careers must be carefully assessed. Every competition organiser - FIFA, regional confederations, national associations, leagues or private operators - rely on the same workforce to drive their competitions: the players. They create the social, sporting and economic value.

THE IMPACT OF COMPETITIONS

Both at club and international level, the number of competitions has increased over the last 25 years.

New competitions have appeared, and old ones have been modified. Friendly games

have been replaced with competitive games, extra rounds have been added to existing championships, and football has become faster and more physically intensive.

Still, competition organisers at all levels are looking to add new reforms to existing competition formats - increasing games and giving players larger workloads without proper safeguards in place. The possible UEFA Champions League reform, the Club World Cup discussions, domestic league and cup reforms and the growth of the International Champions Cup all have the potential to alter the competitive nature of the game and affect players' well-being.



STATISTICS & DATA ON PLAYER WORKLOAD

DATA METHODOLOGY*

The purpose of this report is to highlight individual player workload at the elite level.

The selected players were chosen based on the following criteria: First, players had to represent club and country at international level. Second, the player sample had to collectively represent all continents. Third, they had to play in one of the Top 5 European Leagues, with the exception of Lasse Schöne who was selected because of Denmark's and Ajax's long run into international competitions over the last 12 months. All matches were counted in the period between the FIFA World Cup 2018 and the end of the season 2018/2019 including national team competitions.

I AM SURE THAT IF YOU, AS A PLAYER, WANT TO GIVE YOUR BEST 100% OF THE TIME, WITH ALL THE EXPECTATIONS THAT OTHERS HAVE OF YOU, YOU NEED A BREAK. **A BREAK TO BE ABLE TO RECOVER EASILY, TO HAVE FULL STRENGTH FOR WHAT COMES NEXT.**

KEVIN TRAPP | GERMANY

PIERRE-EMERICK AUBAMEYANG



FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 13 JUNE 2019

GABON, ARSENAL FC

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang played a full season with Arsenal, playing 59 games to reach the final of the Europa League, 59% of which were played with less than five days of rest (35).

Because of his non-participation in the World Cup with Gabon, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang was allowed a long resting period of 50 days in the summer of 2018. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang travelled 36,200 kilometres with the Gabonese national team.

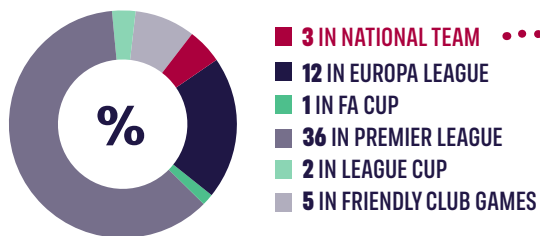
59 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



36,200KM
FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM

ALISSON BECKER



FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 10 JULY 2019

BRASIL, LIVERPOOL FC

The Brazilian goalkeeper played 72 matches with Liverpool, and played every game in both the Champions league and the Premier League.

Most of his games with the national team were played in the first six months of the season. 70% of his games were played without the recommended five days of rest. He travelled 80,000 kilometres with his national team. He benefitted from 23 days of rest this summer following Brazil's early exit in the World Cup.

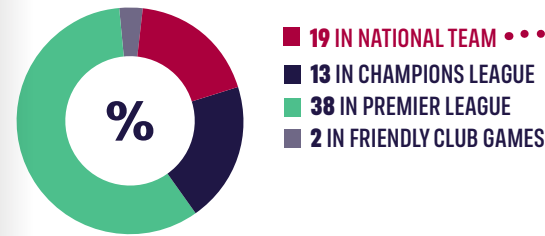
72 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



80,000KM
FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM

RADAMEL FALCAO



FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 10 JULY 2019

COLOMBIA, AS MONACO

The Colombian striker played a comparatively low total of 57 games with AS Monaco, mainly because of ASM's early elimination in the French cup competition and the Champions League.

Most of his games were still played with less than five days of rest (50%) with a total of 100,000 kilometres travelled with his national team over the year.

57 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



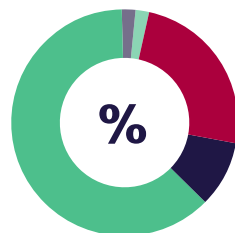
50% GAMES PLAYED WITH < 5 DAYS OF REST



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



- 17 IN NATIONAL TEAM
- 5 IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
- 33 IN LIGUE 1
- 1 IN COUPE DE FRANCE
- 1 IN TROPHÉE DES CHAMPIONS

100,000KM FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM

DIEGO GODÍN



FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 10 JULY 2019

URUGUAY, ATLÉTICO DE MADRID

The Uruguayan defender Diego Godín got injured five times, missing 14 games this season with a total of 56 matches played.

He travelled over 110,000 kilometres for 16 national team matches. 58% percent of his games were played without five days of rest. He benefitted from 30 days of rest last summer, thus within the recommended minimum period.

56 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



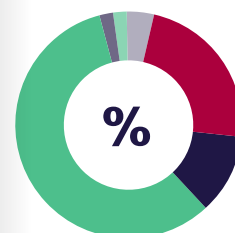
58% GAMES PLAYED WITH < 5 DAYS OF REST



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



- 16 IN NATIONAL TEAM
- 6 IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
- 30 IN LA LIGA
- 1 IN FRIENDLY CLUB GAMES
- 1 IN UEFA SUPER CUP
- 2 IN COPA DEL REY

110,000KM FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM

EDEN HAZARD



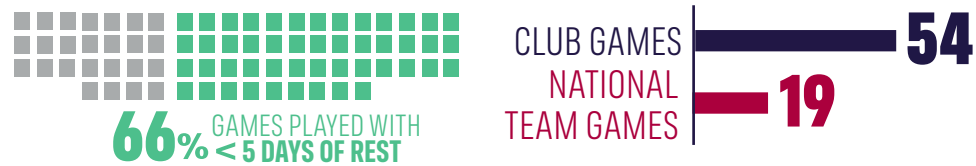
FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 13 JUNE 2019

BELGIUM, CHELSEA FC

Hazard played 73 games due to Belgium's run in the FIFA World Cup and in the UEFA Europa League. The Belgian played 66% of his games with less than five days of rest, suffering from the absence of a winter break in the UK and a long summer due to the World Cup.

Hazard only had a 21 day break last summer, far from the ideal minimum rest period. He played 19 games with the national team, more than any other player in our sample. Hazard travelled 27,600 kilometres with the Belgian national team.

73 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



HARRY KANE



FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 13 JUNE 2019

ENGLAND, TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR FC

Harry Kane missed two months of competition due to injury, missing games in September, October, January, April and May.

He still totalled 57 games, including 38 without five days of rest (67%). Following a good run at the World Cup, the Tottenham striker rested for only 22 days over the summer, and no days in winter. Harry Kane travelled 28,550 kilometres with the English national team.

57 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



FRANCK KESSIE



FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 11 JULY 2019

IVORY COAST, AC MILAN

In his second season with AC Milan, Franck Kessie played 58 games, including five games with the Ivory Coast.

He played his last European game in early December, and he is one of the few players in our sample with a majority of games played with at least five days of rest this season (45% with less than five days of rest). As he did not play in the World Cup, he benefited from a proper detraining period in summer. However, his winter break consisted of only eight days, which is less than the minimum recommended. Franck Kessie travelled 60,000 kilometres with the Ivory Coast national team.

58 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



SADIO MANÉ



FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 19 JULY 2019

SENEGAL, LIVERPOOL FC

The Senegalese forward played a total of 70 games, including 16 with Senegal (three at the World Cup).

A majority of these (68%) were played with less than five days of rest. As with all players in England, Mané did not enjoy any break over winter and only had 22 days of rest after the World Cup before joining Liverpool for their pre-season summer tour. Sadio Mané travelled 100,000 kilometres with the Senegalese national team.

70 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



CHRISTIAN PULISIC



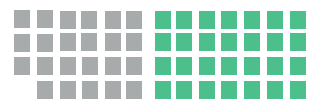
FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 8 JULY 2019

USA, BORUSSIA DORTMUND

The American forward had a difficult season at Dortmund. Five injuries have led him to miss 14 games this season with a total of 49 games played.

55% of the games he played were without five days of rest. He is on of the few players to have benefited from a full period of rest - 38 days - over the summer. During the winter, he had 14 days of rest, the minimum required amount. In spite of his injuries and not participating at the World Cup, Christian Pulisic still travelled 45,000 kilometres over the year with his national team.

49 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



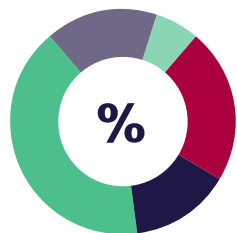
55% GAMES PLAYED WITH < 5 DAYS OF REST



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



- 11 IN NATIONAL TEAM
- 7 IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
- 20 IN BUNDESLIGA
- 8 IN FRIENDLY CLUB GAMES
- 3 IN DFB POKAL

45,000KM
FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM

HIROKI SAKAI



FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 13 JUNE 2019

JAPAN, OLYMPIQUE DE MARSEILLE

Despite participating in the Asian Cup with Japan and playing 15 games with his national team, Hiroki Sakai played only 36% of his 49 games with less than five days of rest.

Olympique Marseille's early exit from the Europa League and the national cup allowed him to have at least 5 days of rest between games throughout the remainder of the season. In spite of Japan's early exit from the World Cup, he only enjoyed 22 days of rest. Hiroki Sakai travelled 77,100 kilometres with the Japanese national team.

49 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



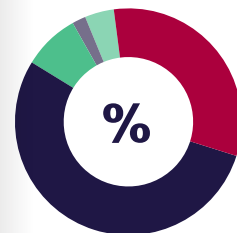
36% GAMES PLAYED WITH < 5 DAYS OF REST



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



- 15 IN NATIONAL TEAM
- 27 IN LIGUE 1
- 4 IN EUROPA LEAGUE
- 1 IN COUPE DE LA LIGUE
- 2 IN FRIENDLY CLUB GAMES

77,100KM
FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM

MOHAMED SALAH



FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 6 JULY 2019

EGYPT, LIVERPOOL FC

With 66 games this season and a very long run in the UEFA Champions League, Mo Salah had a busy season. 68% of his games were played with less than five days of rest, the second highest rate in our sample.

Salah did not have the recommended time to recuperate in a vast majority of cases. He only played ten games with his national team, World Cup included, which allowed him to rest during the international breaks. Mohamed Salah travelled 50,000 kilometres with the Egyptian national team.

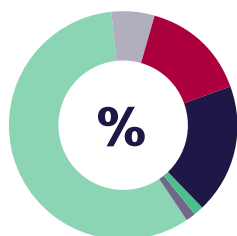
66 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



- 10 IN NATIONAL TEAM
- 12 IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
- 1 IN FA CUP
- 1 IN ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP
- 38 IN PREMIER LEAGUE
- 4 IN FRIENDLY CLUB GAMES

50,000KM
FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM

LASSE SCHÖNE



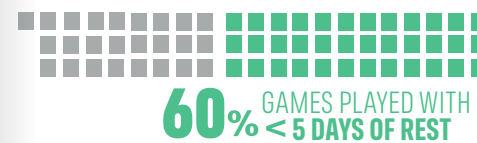
FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 13 JUNE 2019

DENMARK, AFC AJAX

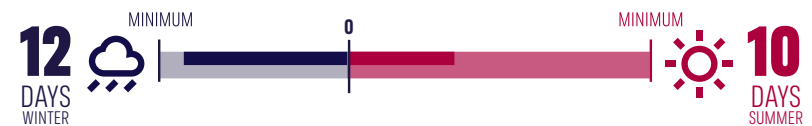
With 62 games, including 10 with his national team, Lasse Schöne had a busy calendar year.

Participating in the World Cup, advancing through the group stage and reaching the semi-final of the Champions League with Ajax did not give the Danish international a lot of rest time. He was only allowed 10 days of seasonal break over the summer and 12 days over winter, far from the recommended minimum. Out of these 62 games, 60% were played with less than 5 days of rest. Lasse Schöne travelled 26,000 kilometres with the Danish national team.

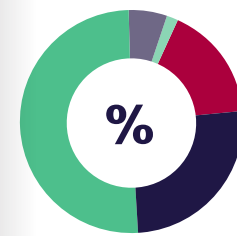
62 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



SEASON BREAKS



BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



- 10 IN NATIONAL TEAM
- 15 IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
- 32 IN EREDIVISIE
- 4 IN TOTO CUP
- 1 IN FRIENDLY CLUB GAMES

26,000KM
FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM

RAPHAEL
VARANE



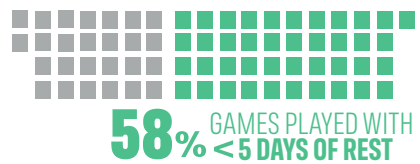
FROM 25 MAY 2018
TO 13 JUNE 2019

FRANCE, REAL MADRID CF

World Champion and 4 time UEFA Champions League winner, Raphael Varane, played 62 games this season, including 18 with his national team, France.

58% of his games (36) were played with less than five days of rest. He was allowed 23 days of rest this summer and nine days in winter. Due to Real Madrid's early knock-out of the Champions League and Copa del Rey, Varane had more time to rest between La Liga games. Raphael Varane travelled 30,000 kilometres with the French national team.

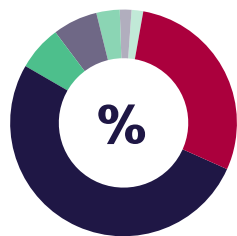
62 TOTAL GAMES PLAYED



SEASON BREAKS

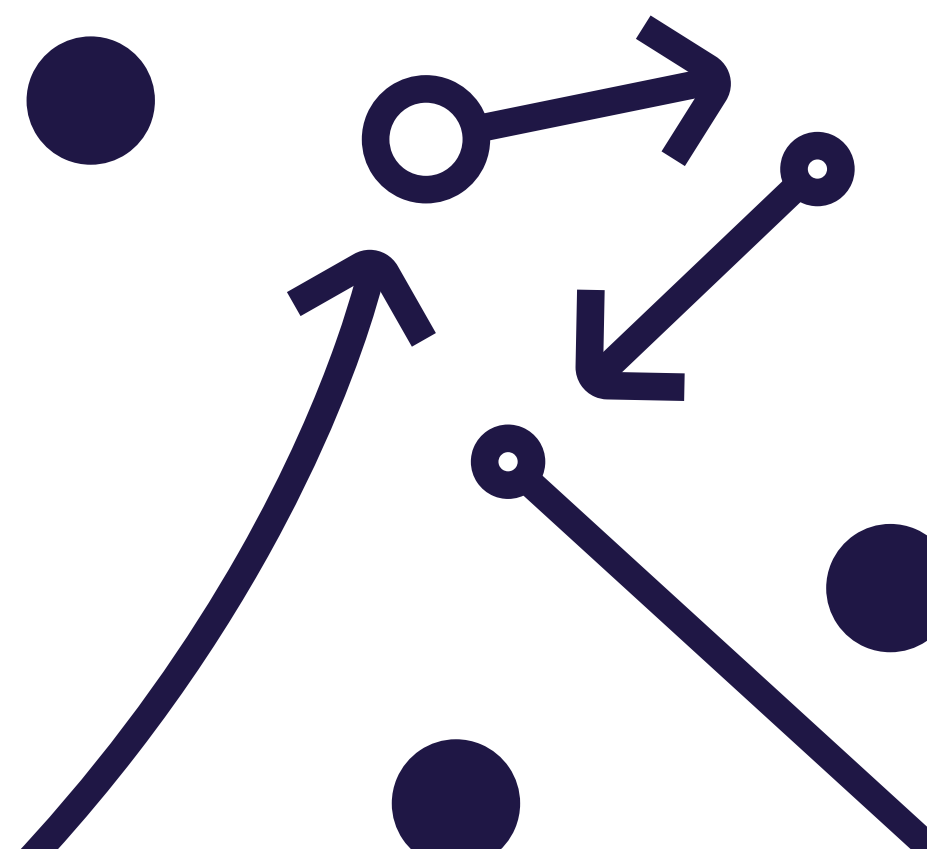


BREAK DOWN PER COMPETITION



- 18 IN NATIONAL TEAM
- 32 IN LA LIGA
- 4 IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
- 4 IN COPA DEL REY
- 2 IN CLUB WORLD CUP
- 1 IN UEFA SUPER CUP
- 1 IN FRIENDLY CLUB GAMES

30,000KM
FLOWN WITH NATIONAL TEAM



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

CAN ELITE PLAYERS PROTECT THEMSELVES AND IS REGULATORY INTERVENTION REQUIRED?

Elite players are faced with vulnerable career paths and a short career span. From a very early age, these players are faced with high workload, minimal rest periods and increasing demands in the professional game. Even at an elite level, the position of players is vulnerable and volatile due to an extremely competitive employment market for players. Consequently, players feel pressured to protect their position at all cost – even if it is at the expense of their long term health and sustainability of their own career. Furthermore, elite players are faced with high expectations and demands from teams, coaches, sponsors, media and the public. Even for elite players, it is challenging to articulate and demand the appropriate protection and safeguards they require in such an environment on an individual basis. It is therefore necessary to empower players, and provide a framework in which they are protected against external pressures which will ultimately have a damaging effect on themselves and the game. Regulatory intervention such as match caps could be one of the pathways to be considered in this context.

IS A HEAVY WORKLOAD AN ISSUE FOR ALL PLAYERS?

Increasing match intensity and high workload is indeed becoming an issue for a growing number of players. At the same time, new competition formats are also increasing workload for a growing number of players. Some players played an excessive amount of games with both clubs and national teams. Others are not exposed to a sufficient number of competitive games in their domestic competition structures. This should serve as a reminder that the football community should not only focus on the elite game but that we need to innovate and find better working solutions across all tiers of the professional industry.

ARE FEMALE PLAYERS EXPOSED TO THE SAME CHALLENGES?

In addition to the research on regional specificities, the professional women's game also requires separate research to look into the player workload in elite women's football. In general, our research on professional women's football showcases that while the women's game represents an emerging industry within professional football many of the players are suffering from structural deficiencies in domestic leagues including a lack of matches and high level competition. At the same time, the match calendar in professional women's football is fragmented, forcing players to compete across a range of different competitions, sometimes even for different clubs.

IS THERE ANY ADDITIONAL MEDICAL EVIDENCE TO THE GUIDELINES PRESENTED?

Increasing match intensity and workload is associated with a higher risk of muscle injuries. Besides the adequate management of players' workload, the implementation of sufficient in- and off-season breaks, and the implementation of additional rest following long flights (especially those inducing jet-lag), attention should be given to innovative methods of injury prevention. For instance, the implementation of hamstring specific exercises (such as the Nordic hamstring curl) leads to a 70-95% reduction of hamstring injuries.

HOW DO OTHER ELITE SPORTS PROTECT THE HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE OF THEIR ATHLETES?

Direct comparisons between elite sports are difficult to make due to load specificities of each sport. However, there are some general observations which can be made. In comparison with leading team sports in the United States, professional football operates a fragmented sporting calendar and features several different competition organisers at domestic and international level. As a consequence the game cannot provide its players with guaranteed windows for rest and recovery. In comparison, competition organisers in other team sports have introduced highly regulated off-season breaks to ensure rest and recovery and have collectively bargained all elements of player load in game and practice times with the relevant Player associations.



WE AS PLAYERS ARE THE ONES AFFECTED BY POLICY, PUTTING IN THE LABOUR, CARRYING THE HIGHEST RISK OF INJURY, AND **WE HAVE SHORT LIFE SPANS IN THE INDUSTRY.**