

CIES Football Observatory
Summer Series 2024

MATCH CALENDAR AND PLAYER WORKLOAD

3

**PLAYERS MOST IN-DEMAND
CURRENT STAND AND 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.

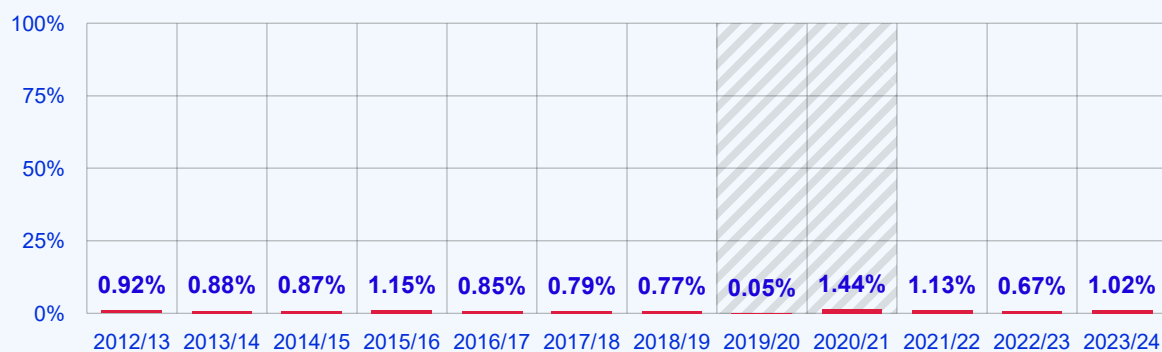
ANALYSIS 2012-2024

In total, the sample surveyed includes 62 156 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 18 932 players.

Between 2012 and 2024, as a seasonal average, only 0.88 % of the players in the 40 leagues worldwide analysed played more than 4 500 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.

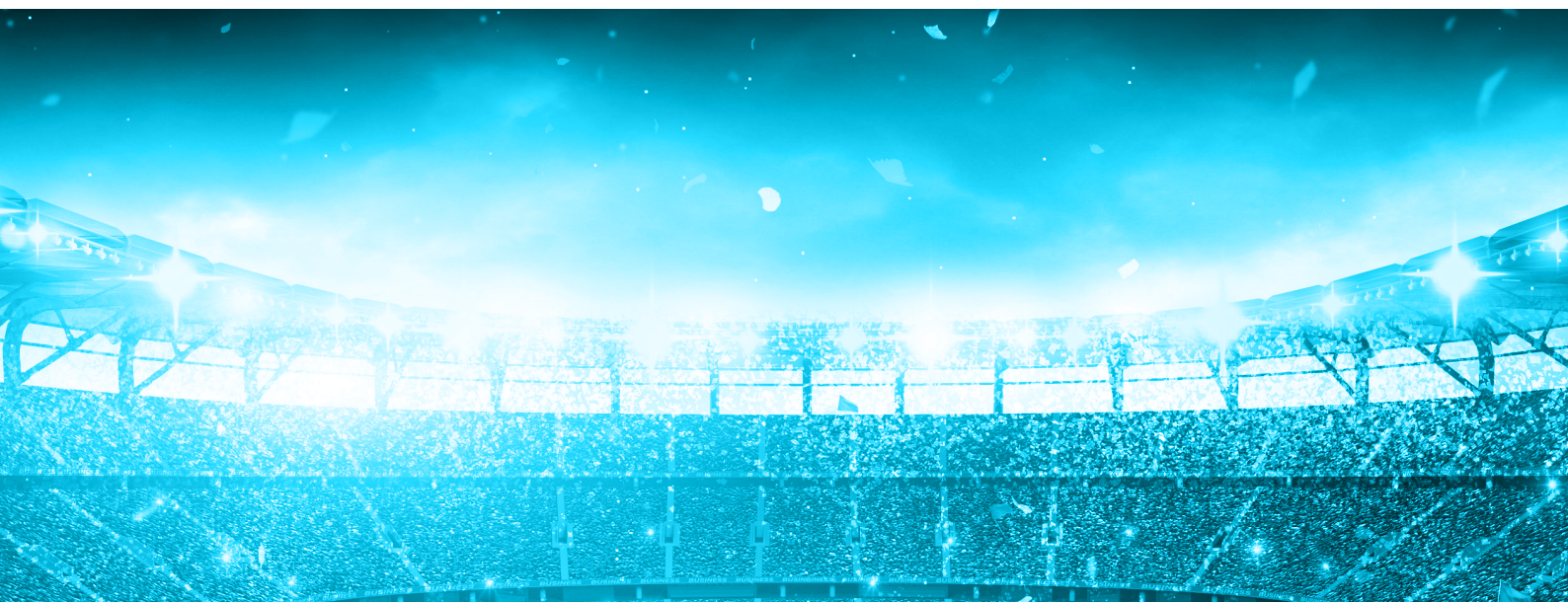
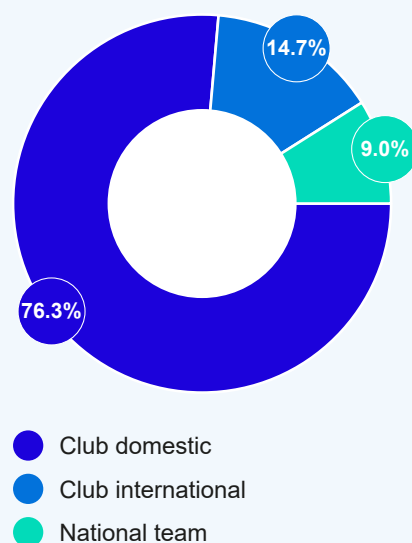


Figure 1: percentage of players fielded for >4 500 official game minutes, per season



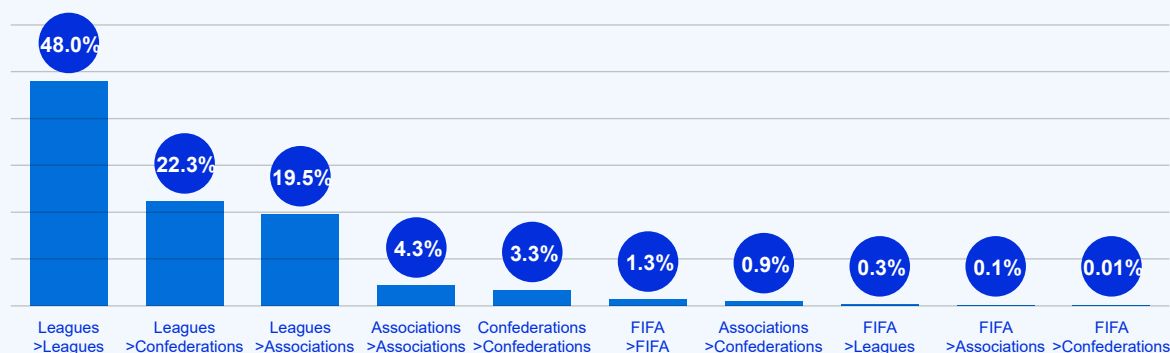
Over three quarters of the playing time of footballers who were fielded for more than 4500 minutes per season during a give one of the twelve studied have been in domestic club competitions: 76.3%. The proportion of minutes played in international club competitions is 14.7%, while that played in national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

Figure 2: percentage of minutes of most in-demand players, per type of competition



Almost half of the matches played by all footballers in the sample analysed with less than 72 hours between kick-offs 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.

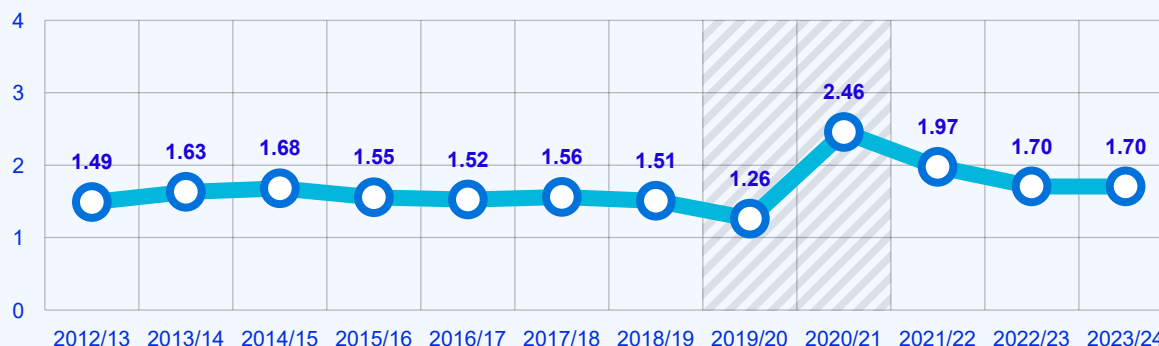
Figure 3: percentage of back-to-back matches (≤ 72 hours rest), per organisers



* Back-to-back matches involving different organisers

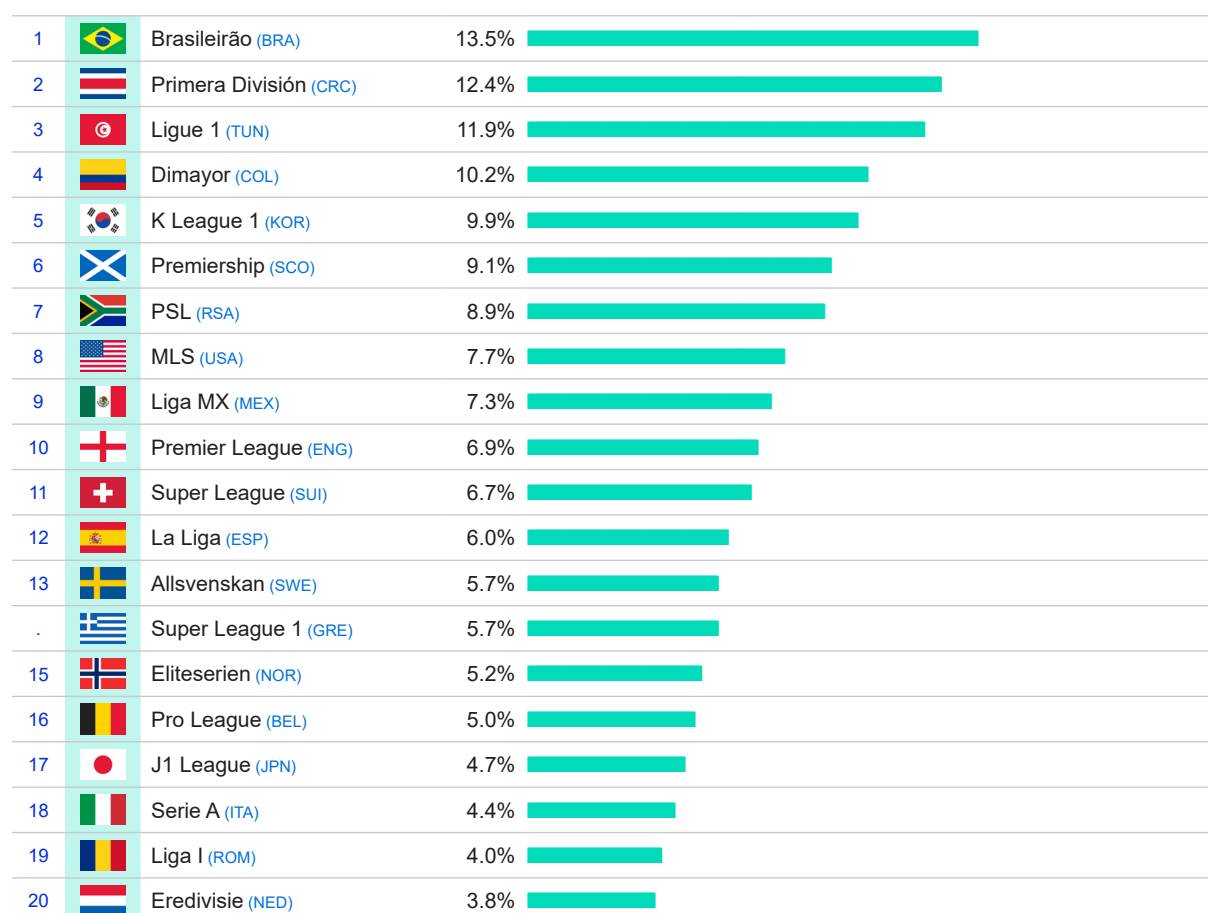
If we look at the average number of matches per season and footballer played in an interval of 72 hours or less, we find out that this type of situation is relatively rare. On average, a footballer only plays 1.68 matches per season in an interval of 72 hours or less between the kick-offs. After the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

Figure 4: average number of back-to-back matches (≤ 72 hours rest) per season and player



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%).

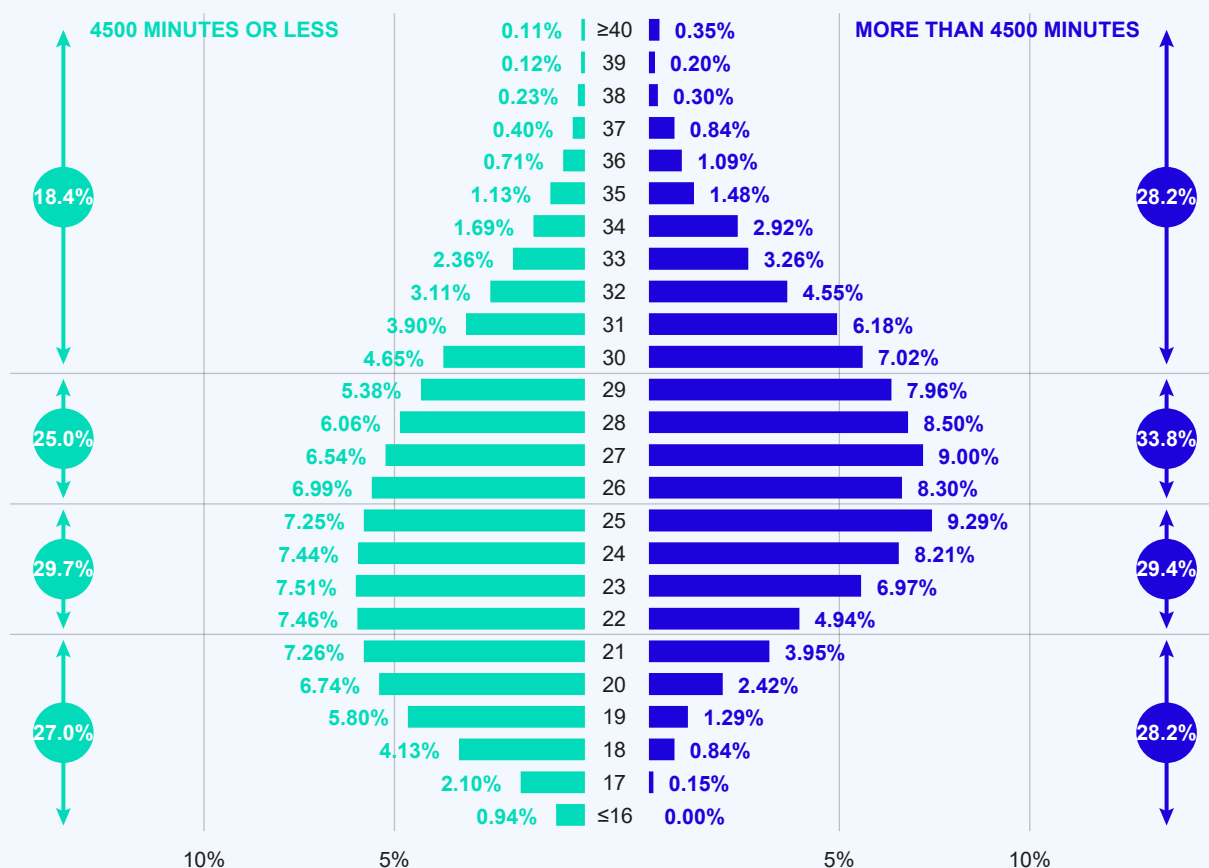
Figure 5: domestic leagues with the highest percentage of back-to-back matches (≤ 72 hours rest), 2012-2024





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 >4500 minutes per season versus other players

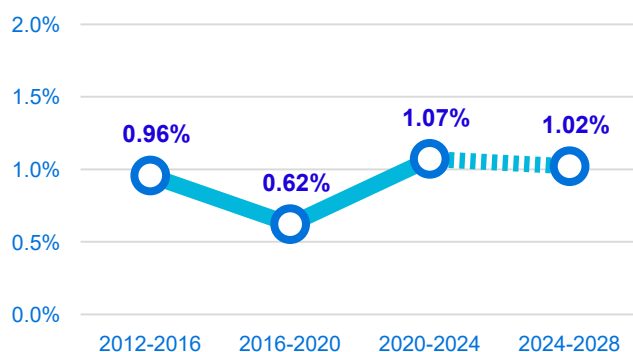


PROJECTIONS 2024-2028

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 - squad turnover, increase to five substitutions and competitive balance - despite expanded formats for some competitions which impact relatively few players.

Figure 7: percentage of players with >4500 minutes per season



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 (>4500 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%

CONCLUSION

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, five 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).



Annex: leagues surveyed

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

Since its creation in 2005, the Football Observatory research group within the CIES (Centre International d'Étude du Sport) has become a reference point in the demographic and economic study of the football players' labour and transfer markets, the analysis of the clubs' and players' performance (technical, tactical, physical), as well as the scientific estimation of transfer values.

The CIES Football Observatory is regularly mandated by key governing bodies (FIFA, UEFA, ECA, SAFF, etc.), many of the most renowned clubs worldwide (Chelsea, Arsenal, Atlético de Madrid, Benfica, Olympique Lyonnais, Ajax, etc.), as well as player unions, agents, lawyers and sponsors.

The CIES Football Observatory enjoys considerable success and a rapidly growing reputation. More than 31,000 subscribers receive our weekly newsletters. The website (football-observatory.com) records more than one million visits per year. The group is also present on the principle social media with a total of >130,000 followers.

More information: www.football-observatory.com