



**AUSTRALIAN
PROFESSIONAL
LEAGUES**
ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

LEAGUES

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

This year has been one of the most extraordinary for football in Australia and New Zealand. In the past 12 months, we have watched two World Cups featuring more A-League players than ever before. Including a FIFA Women's World Cup hosted here on home soil that was watched by almost 2 million fans in stadiums across the two countries. On the biggest of global stages, our local heroes stood tall. The achievements of the Australian national teams were delivered by 46 players, 43 of whom were developed here in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men and the Liberty A-League Women.

This is not an accident. It is the direct result of investments over many years by our clubs with a vision of a thriving league where fans can watch fast-paced and exciting football, and where Subway Socceroos and CommBank Matildas are made. As we strive to create an ever more professional environment for our footballers in the Liberty A-League it's gratifying to see players such as Cortnee Vine, Kyah Simon and Lydia Williams headline this season after their incredible World Cup performances.

Very soon, we will have men's and women's teams in every single one of our A-League clubs. That means that grassroots players, boys and girls, can share the same dream of playing for their local team, and from there earning the opportunity to represent their country. This year has also seen us begin to awaken the global football economy to the strength of the A-League. Our annual transfer fee records were broken in a single transfer window thanks to the international interest in academy products like Sammy Silvera, Jordan Bos, Anthony Pavlešić and Marco Tilio.

It is vital that we continue to support our players' journeys overseas, and equally vital that we are a destination of choice for local and international players alike.



PAUL LEDERER

Next season we will add new clubs in both Australia and in New Zealand, with further expansion planned in the following year, creating more opportunities for players, more competitiveness, and more compelling drama for our fans.

In the last two and a half years, the Australian Professional Leagues has undergone an extraordinary transformation and as I formally step down as Chair of the APL Board while remaining on the Board, I do so with immense pride in the foundations that have been built, and with gratitude to my fellow board members and our talented management team.

The environment has never been more exciting for football, and I welcome the Hon Stephen Conroy as the first ever Independent Chair of the APL. I look forward to working with Stephen, a deeply passionate football fan and highly experienced political operator, as our domestic professional game moves from strength to strength.

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Two years ago, we set in motion an ambitious new strategy to help us realise our vision to establish football as the most entertaining and popular sport across Australasia. At its heart was the intent to "inspire the next-generation of A-League superstars to fulfil their potential."

On the eve of a new season, and with unprecedented numbers of young players making their mark in our leagues, there is much for the A-League to be proud of and excited by.

With the challenges of the global pandemic behind us, season 2022-2023 represented an increase in the number of fans attending our games, a growth in the popularity of our league across conventional and digital channels. I recognise the season was, at various times, challenging for all of us; players, coaches, administrators and fans. Clearly, when we are trying to rebuild a league into one that's not just sustainable but growing, there will be points of disagreement, sometimes heated.

But the overwhelming sense I get from the last year, particularly as we built forums for our fans to have meaningful input into that growth, is how lucky we are to have supporters who care so much about our game.

The FIFA Women's World Cup has delivered football in our region an enormous opportunity. We all must now take responsibility for leveraging the momentum created by the excitement of the tournament. We want to make sure the almost two million fans who attended World Cup games, or the many millions more who were enthralled by the event's broadcast, look to the A-League as their way of continuing to feel the excitement provided by top-quality football.

With every CommBank Matildas squad member a product of the Liberty A-League Women and with many of those players now returning to play in Australia, clubs are now focused on delivering the next generation of national team players.

Last season saw the highly successful debut of Western United's team in the Liberty A-League as part of APL's expansion strategy across the A-League. This coming season will see the



DANNY TOWNSEND

Central Coast Mariners women enter the Liberty A-League making it a genuine home and away league across 22 rounds, and cementing the league as a highly competitive and high quality destination for homegrown and international talent.

In March, we announced our decision to expand into Auckland and Canberra with both processes well progressed in order for these new clubs to enter the league in 2024-2025. The growth of APL's content business, KEEPU, has continued at pace over the past year. As a demonstration of the maturing of KEEPU, it was one of the leading publishers of digital content during the FIFA Women's World Cup despite not being an official rights-holder. Australian football stories, at all levels of the game have a huge audience.

In closing, I want to offer my personal and sincere thanks to outgoing Chair of the APL Paul Lederer. As our inaugural Chair, Paul has been at the helm through the time of the global pandemic, and during our subsequent extraordinary growth. Quite simply, we could not have done this without Paul's leadership over the past two and a half years.

I welcome new APL Chair the Hon Stephen Conroy to the board. His knowledge and passion for football together with his ability to create consensus among important stakeholders will be vital for realising the next stage of our ambition.

CHAPTER ONE //

FOOTBALL



Isuzu UTE

A-League Men

30%

Increase in assists by U23 players since 2019

477

Goals scored in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men across the season

57%

Increase in goals by U23 players since 2019

2.97

Average goals per game since 2018, the highest of any men's league in Asia

A LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

**Liberty
A-League Women**

41%

Increase in the number of games played in the expanded Liberty A-League Women 2022-2023 (regular season)

274

Players contracted to clubs, a 42% increase from five years ago

30%

Increase in the number of goals scored in the Liberty A-League Women compared to the previous season (302 compared to 232)

38

number of players of a nationality outside of Australia or New Zealand

**Made in the
A-Leagues**

8

Record number of Isuzu UTE A-League players selected for the men's Australia squad for the 2022 FIFA World Cup

100%

Percentage of members of the women's Australia squad for the 2023 FIFA World Cup who play or have played for Liberty A-League Women teams

1.0 // OVERVIEW

The 2022-2023 season was a landmark season for the A-Leagues; it was the first without disruption from COVID, and included two FIFA World Cups - the men's in Qatar and the women's in Australia and New Zealand.

A record number of Isuzu UTE A-League Men's players - eight - featured in the Subway Socceroos squad, and every single member of the CommBank Matildas squad was either a current or past player in the Liberty A-League Women. At least seven of New Zealand's Football Ferns will play in the Liberty A-League Women in season 2023-24.

The international tournaments drove interest and engagement in the domestic game, with attendances up by a combined 46% in the two leagues.

Two new teams were added to the Liberty A-League Women in the last two seasons - Wellington Phoenix in 2021-2022, and Western United in 2022-2023 - which meant the season was the longest ever. Between the men's and women's leagues, more than 750 goals were scored over a record 255 regular season games.

Central Coast Mariners were the fairytale story of the Isuzu UTE A-League Men, winning against back-to-back Premiers Melbourne City and claiming their second-ever Championship in the highest scoring A-Leagues Grand Final ever.

Western United reached the Liberty A-League Women Grand Final in their debut season, falling just short of a Championship with a loss to Sydney FC that broke the attendance record for a standalone domestic Women's football match in Australia and New Zealand.

1.1 //

Liberty A-League Women

A-League stars made an impact domestically and internationally

The 2022-2023 season was a history-making season for the Liberty A-League Women with more games played, more teams and players involved and more fans attending than ever before.

The season opened with a New Zealand record broken thanks to more than 5,000 fans at Wellington Phoenix's opening game, and closed with another record broken with more than 9,500 fans at CommBank Stadium in Sydney for the Grand Final between Western United and Sydney FC. Overall, average attendances were up by 13%, and the expansion in the number of games meant that aggregate attendance across all matches rose by 60%. For the first time ever, fans were able to watch every single match live and free on TenPlay, and live on Australia's fastest growing streaming service Paramount+. This made the A-League Women the only professional women's league in Australia to have all games shown live and free.

Western United became the Liberty A-League Women's 12th team, and achieved the extraordinary feat of reaching the final in their debut season. As well as developing young, local talent with 11 players making their Liberty A-League Women's debut, CommBank Matildas star Chloe Logarzo and USWNT World Cup Winner Jess McDonald both joined Western United on loan.

With more than 270 players contracted to clubs, there has been a 42% increase in the number of contracted players over the last five years, a number that is set to grow as Central Coast Mariners become the third new team in three years when they join in 2023/24.



Isuzu UTE A-League Men

The Isuzu UTE A-League Men continues to play an essential role in the development of Australian and New Zealand talent for the benefit of both the domestic game and the national teams.

Thanks to a significant investment in academies by Isuzu UTE A-League Men clubs over recent years, the transfer record for a calendar year was broken in a single transfer window following the conclusion of the 2022-2023 season. This is a clear demonstration of the impact of that investment and also recognition of the contribution of academy graduates during the 2022-2023 season. These players and clubs have helped generate important revenues for the game while also helping build the profile of Australian football on the international stage.

Fans fell in love with young stars such as Adelaide's Nestory Irankunda, Central Coast's Sam Silvera, Melbourne City's Jordan Bos and Western Sydney Wanderers' Calem Niewenhof. There has been a 36% increase in goals by U23 players since 2019, and a 23% increase in assists in the same age group.

A record number of current Isuzu UTE A-League Men players featured in the FIFA World Cup 2022, including players from Adelaide United, Central Coast Mariners, Melbourne City FC and Sydney FC.

E-League

In 2023, the E-League was established as a fully fledged esports league as content more than tripled from 24 hours in the previous season to 87 hours of competitive gameplay streamed in 2023.

The E-League evolved significantly from season 1, going from a four-week exhibition set of matches to a 12-week comprehensive league system which culminated in an in-person final series at Fortress Sydney with the won by Western Sydney Wanderers' Mark11.

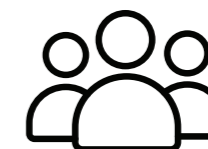
In the E-League's second year, new commercial partnerships were established with globally recognised brands McDonalds and Nivea.

**The 2023
E-League
Season in
stats**



1.02m

Streamed minutes across the E-League season



96,300

unique viewers across the 12 weeks of competition



350k+ fans

Reached across the E-League Facebook & Instagram page

1.2 //**Made in the A-Leagues**

The international success of Australia and New Zealand's national teams is determined by the A-Leagues, with every single CommBank Matilda having come through the Liberty A-League Women and almost every Subway Socceroos player having played in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men.

The Subway Socceroos recorded their highest ever finish in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, with a record number of current Isuzu UTE A-League Men players in the squad.

The CommBank Matildas reached the semi-finals of the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023, with every single player having played in the

Liberty A-League Women.

Beyond the Australian national team, 16 Liberty A-League talents represented the nations of New Zealand, China and the Philippines at the FIFA Women's World Cup.

The A-Leagues also contributed enormously to the national under-age teams. Across the U-17 Joeys, Australia U-18, U-20 Young Socceroos, U-23 Olyroos, U-20 Young Matildas and U-23 Matildas junior national teams selected in 2023, more than 120 of the 134 representatives have either come through or are still part of an A-Leagues club's youth program.

1.3 //**More teams, more games, more players, more football**

Since the A-Leagues became independent in 2020, the Australian Professional Leagues (APL) has been focused on expanding the league to offer greater opportunities to new geographical markets and football fans in underserved markets. Expansion will also greatly increase the pathway opportunities for young footballers, male and female, to turn professional and contribute to on-field success.

Three new teams have been announced for the Liberty A-League Women - Wellington Phoenix (2021-2022), Western United (2022-2023) and Central Coast Mariners (2023-2024), and in March 2023 APL announced

that Auckland and Canberra had been identified as markets of interest for the next round of expansion across both competitions.

Since this announcement, there has been an extensive amount of consultation conducted with regional stakeholders, governments, potential investors and local football communities with the intention for new teams to join A-Leagues in season 2024/2025.

1.4 //**The A-Leagues is the pathway for the best young talent**

A-Leagues clubs have made significant investments in their academies in recent years as part of a strategy to develop home-grown talent for the benefit of the domestic game and national teams.

This year, the transfer fees record for a calendar year was broken in a single transfer window as international football clubs recognised the quality of players developed in Australia and New Zealand. Contributions by U23 players remains significant in terms of goals and assists, and minutes for U23 players remains higher than it was in 2019.

More than 20 Isuzu UTE A-League Men players have broken into the Subway Socceroos squad for the first time in the last three years, with more than 60% of those representatives being players under the age of 23 at the time of their debut.

The establishment and expansion of development programs across our Liberty A-League Women clubs is also progressing. Some clubs, including Newcastle, Central Coast and Wellington have in place academy systems for girls while other clubs are increasing their focus on the development of focused pathways and identification programs for girls.

The Liberty A-League Women stars of the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 Australia and New Zealand

Each member of the Matildas World Cup squad has played in the A-League. Four played in Liberty A-League Women season 2022-2023 which were Cortnee Vine, Katrina Gorry, Alex Chidiac & Clare Hunt.

New Zealand World Cup squad members who played in the Liberty A-League season 2022-2023

Liz Anton (Perth Glory), Katie Bowen (Melbourne City), Claudia Bunge (Melbourne Victory), Michaela Foster (Wellington Phoenix), Betsy Hassett (Wellington Phoenix), Malia Steinmetz (Western Sydney Wanderers), Milly Clegg (Wellington Phoenix), Grace Jale (Canberra United), Indiah-Paige Riley (Brisbane Roar), Paige Satchell (Wellington Phoenix) and Hannah Wilkinson (Melbourne City)

China

Wu Chengshu (Canberra United)

Philippines

Kiara Fontanila (Central Coast Mariners), Angela Beard (Western United), Jaclyn Sawicki (Western United), Sarina Bolden (Western Sydney Wanderers)

The Isuzu UTE A-League Men stars of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022

8 Isuzu UTE A-League Men players were selected in the World Cup squad for Australia, achieving the highest ever finish for the Subway Socceroos.

2022 WC squad members

Andrew Redmayne (Sydney FC), Danny Vukovic (Central Coast Mariners), Mathew Leckie (Melbourne City), Jamie Maclaren (Melbourne City), Marco Tilio (Melbourne City), Craig Goodwin (Adelaide United), Jason Cummings (Central Coast Mariners), Garang Kuol (Central Coast Mariners)

A-League players who made Socceroos debuts post WC

Aiden O'Neill (Melb City), Joe Gauci (Adelaide United), Jordan Bos (Melb City)

CHAPTER TWO //

FANS



2.0 // OVERVIEW

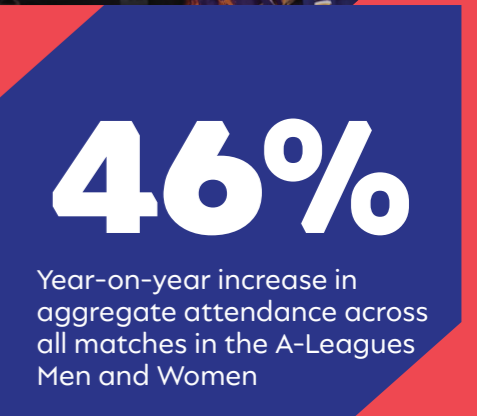
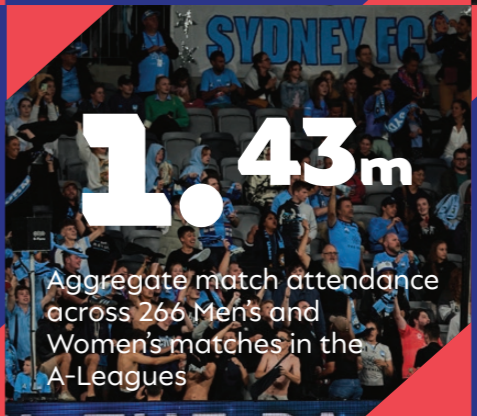
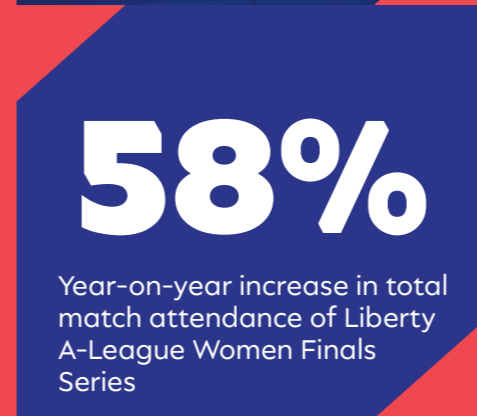
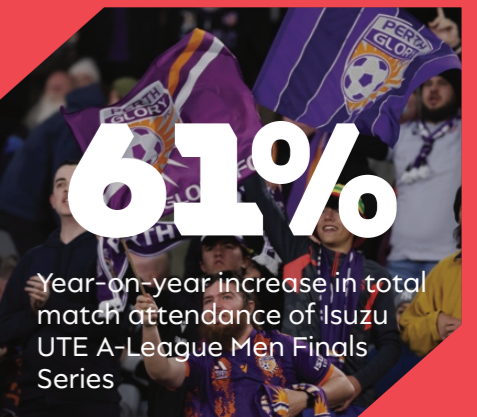
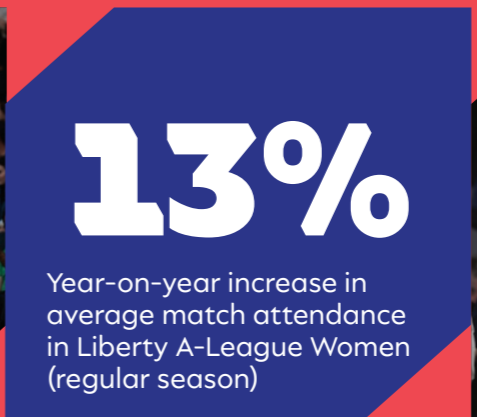
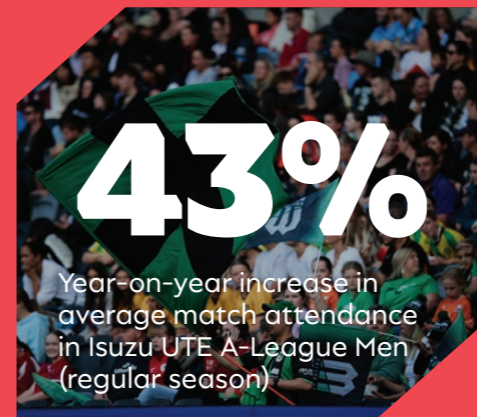
With two FIFA World Cups, a new Liberty A-League Women team, and the first season not impacted by COVID-19, the A-Leagues recorded growth in every area.

Match attendances are almost at pre-pandemic levels, and records were broken for individual games in the men's and women's finals series. TV viewing of live matches was up, with increases in aggregate viewership on both Ten Bold and on Australia's fastest growing streaming platform, Paramount+. Both user numbers and engagement grew at pace on A-Leagues and KEEPUP channels, and total club memberships were also up.

The A-Leagues connected with more fans than ever before thanks to digital and content innovations from KEEPUP, including original content like 'A-Leagues All Access' and the new 'Dub Zone' Studio Show. During the FIFA Men's World Cup Qatar 2022, KEEPUP established itself as a top destination for news on the Subway Socceroos' progress through the tournament.

APL also announced its intent to establish 'Fan Representative Groups' in every club, as well as a league-wide 'Fan Representative Group' made up of a representative group of fans to ensure they have a formal communication channel with their clubs and with the league. This will commence operating in season 2023/2024.

Attendance Stats



2.1 // Matchday Experience

This was an important year for the A Leagues: 2022-2023 was the first season since the outbreak of COVID-19 in which life around the nation started to return to normal, with restrictions on people moving around the country and restrictions on fan numbers at stadiums having been fully lifted. It was also the first full season since we set out our new strategy for the APL, at the heart of which lies our commitment to rebuild the fan experience in the A-Leagues.

Efforts to rebuild the fan experience had a huge impact this season. The Isuzu UTE A-League Men saw a substantial 43% increase in attendances across the regular season, with 10 of the 12 clubs attracting more fans to their games. In the highest game of the season, 34,232 people attended Sydney FC's home derby game against Western Sydney Wanderers, the highest league attendance since the opening game in the 2018/19 season.

Growth was even more impressive in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men's Finals series: total attendance across the seven games was almost 125,000, a huge increase of 61% over the equivalent figure in the previous season. 26,523 people saw Central Coast Mariners beat Melbourne City 6-1 in the Grand Final, 18% more than last year's corresponding attendance.

Across the whole men's season, the average league attendance was 44% up year-on-year and higher than in any of the previous three seasons.

There were also big increases in attendances in the Liberty A-League Women. Average match attendances in the regular season rose by 13%. The expansion of the league this year meant that the number of games played rose by 41%, from 70 to 99. It was some achievement to grow average attendances at the same time as such a large increase in the league itself.

The Liberty A-League Women's Final Series enjoyed similar increases in attendances as the Isuzu UTE A-League Men's: average attendance was 58% up year-on-year. The Grand Final, which saw Sydney FC beat Western United 4-0, drew a crowd of 9,519 fans, 89% up on last year and the largest attendance for any domestic women's club match in history.

Across the whole season, the average league attendance was 15% more than the previous year. While this is a more modest growth rate than in the Men's league, the expansion of the league meant that aggregate attendances across all games rose by 60%, a higher figure than the corresponding 44% figure for the men.

Record attendances set throughout the FIFA Women's World Cup co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand 2023 gave a further huge boost to the profile of women's football, providing greater opportunity for its rapid growth.

One way APL has sought to give young footballers the chance to get close to the action and see their heroes play live was by introducing the Liberty A-League pass at the start of the 2022-2023 season. This initiative gives boys and girls aged 16 and under who are registered footballers free entry to all Liberty A-League games, on any day, at any venue in Australia throughout the season. Passholders are free to go to as many games as they want, home or away.

In its first year, almost 9,000 young fans registered for the Liberty A-League pass to attend games during the 2022-2023 season. The scheme has now been extended to the 2023/24 season and interest is expected to be greater still coming right after the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

TV and Streaming

31%

Year-on-year increase in aggregate minutes viewed of live Isuzu UTE A-League Men games on 10 Bold, 10 Play and Paramount+ (regular season)

63%

Year-on-year increase in aggregate minutes viewed of live Liberty A-League Women games on 10 Bold (prior season), 10 Play and Paramount+ (regular season)

51%

Year-on-year increase in free-to-air TV audience of both the men's and women's Grand Finals

2.2 // Connecting with fans through broadcast, digital and social media

The 2022-2023 season delivered growth in viewing of live games on TV (10 Bold) and streaming (10 Play and the subscription service Paramount+). Free-to-air TV coverage of Isuzu UTE A-League Men doubled to two games per round, in regular Saturday night and Sunday afternoon slots on 10 Bold and 10 Play. For Liberty A-League Women, every single game in every round was available to stream for free for the first time on 10 Play. In both leagues, every game in each round was also available on Paramount+.

As a result, free-to-air viewing of men's games was up by 26% year-on-year, while aggregate viewership on Paramount+, measured in terms of minutes viewed, rose by 55%. Across all services (10 Bold, 10 Play and Paramount+), total minutes viewed were up by 31%.

The increase in the number of games in the Liberty A-League Women and availability of all games on 10 Play as well as Paramount+ resulted in large increases in viewing on the streaming services. Across all the platforms showing live games each season, there was a huge year-on-year increase in aggregate viewership of 63%.

Growth was also strong in the men's and women's Finals Series: in the Isuzu UTE A-League Men Finals Series, across the seven games, all available on free-to-air TV, average viewing was up by 46% year-on-year, while the Grand Final grew its TV audience by 51%. In the Liberty A-League Women, the Grand Final was also shown on free-to-air TV, and also grew its audience by 51% on the previous year. TV audiences for both the men's and women's Grand Finals were the highest since 2019.

Digital and Social Media

The 2022-2023 season saw a steep increase in activity on APL's digital and social media channels. Thousands of pieces of content were published across different media, including text-based news stories, podcasts, short-form video content for social media, official highlights packages and long-form TV shows. The latter included original content with A-Leagues All Access and Dub Zone weekly shows, weekly podcasts, and a branded series created for the Finals series, SEIKO Stoppage Time.

All this activity led to large increases in user numbers and consumption of KEEPUP and A-Leagues content this year. The number of unique users on KEEPUP sites increased by 174% year-on-year. Every A-Leagues club grew the user base of their site, with total users across the clubs more than doubling this year. Across KEEPUP and the clubs' sites, total users rose by 141% this year.

On social media platforms, the number of followers of KEEPUP channels across

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok were 31% up on last year.

There were large increases in engagement with KEEPUP content on social platforms. The number of interactions across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok grew by 168% year-on-year. Video views on social platforms grew even more, by 368% over last year's figure.

The most popular posts went viral online: 14 videos attracted more than one million views, with a clip showing off a piece of skill from Melbourne City's Marco Tilio attracting 23.4 million views on TikTok.

The KEEPUP Commentator Development Programme saw three women - Taryn Heddo, Pokuah Frimpong and Georgia Rajic - selected for a future talent programme and offered their A-Leagues commentary debuts.

2.3 //

Fan Representative Groups

In April 2023, an agreement was formalised with all 13 A-Leagues clubs which committed to the continuation or creation of their own Fan Representative Groups. These club-level groups will be represented in a new national body, the League Fan Representative Group, which met for the first time in September 2023.

This agreement between the clubs and APL follows on from several months of development including benchmarking of global best practice and consultation with local stakeholders to create the best model for Australasia.

The new structure will ensure that fans' voices are heard and considered when key decisions are taken. Nonetheless, the expectation is that adjustments to the

model may be needed and it will evolve over time. The APL and clubs will continue to consult with fan representatives, starting with a mid-season review in the first year.

The announcement of this initiative, and the commitment to a formal process to consider fan voices in decision making, was positively received following the announcement in December 2022 of a commercial partnership to hold the A-Leagues Grand Finals in Sydney.



174%

Year-on-year increase in KEEPUP users

168%

Year-on-year increase in interactions (clicks, comments, likes, etc) with KEEPUP content

368%

Year-on-year increase in social media video views of KEEPUP content

CASE STUDY

A-Leagues All Access / Dub Zone

KEEPUP is constantly innovating in its approaches to engage audiences in different ways and launched two new shows for the 2022-2023 season. In October, the first episode of A-Leagues All Access, a weekly half-hour documentary series that provided exclusive access to teams, players and the league, was broadcast. The series was distributed on the KEEPUP website and social channels, as well as on 10 Bold and streaming services (10 Play and Paramount+).

The series generated high levels of engagement on social media, with 8.8 million video views across platforms. The three episodes that received the highest level of engagement included:

- 1.** *Jason Cummings - exploring how the charismatic striker found a happy home in Gosford, learning to “flick the switch” between the joker inside of him to the motivated striker.*
- 2.** *‘Bad Blood’ - behind the scenes footage of an epic finals match between Western Sydney and Sydney FC*
- 3.** *Garang Kuol - following the young Mariners star’s recruitment by EPL club Newcastle United and Socceroos selection.*

November saw the launch of Dub Zone, a new Saturday afternoon studio programme that followed multiple live Liberty A-League Women matches taking place. Available on 10 Play and Facebook, the programme showed and discussed the goals and key moments as they occurred in a ‘goal-rush’ style show. It also provided a unique opportunity to discuss issues within the league and more broadly in women’s football, particularly in the lead up to the FIFA Women’s World Cup. The innovative format was presented by Niv Owens and Briana Goodchild, with social media commentator Kat Haddad, commentator Teo Pellizzeri, and guest appearances from current and former players and coaches.

The 18 weekly live shows led to almost 1,500 pieces of content that were published on APL’s social platforms. Comparing the Dub Zone social media accounts in January to March 2023 with the Liberty A-League Women accounts for the same period in 2021 (the period before the accounts were closed ahead of the rebranding), content impressions were up by 265%.



CASE STUDY

Men's and Women's FIFA World Cup coverage

Last year's FIFA World Cup in Qatar was an opportunity to help forge KEEPUP's reputation as a trusted source for Australian football content. The content reflected our brand values by offering an expert tone of voice and credibility.

Over the course of our reporting on the Socceroos' progress, we were able to highlight the link between the success of the Australian players in the A-League and the impressive performance of the Socceroos as they reached the Round of 16, before losing narrowly 2-1 to tournament winners Argentina.

Over the course of the World Cup, from mid-November to mid-December 2022, video views on our social channels were more than four times the figure for the same period in 2021. Our sites generated more than five times as many content impressions as in the same period a year earlier. And the number of social interactions was up by 256% over the period of the World Cup.



FIFA Women's World Cup 2023

KEEPUP dedicated significant resources to covering each and every game of the Australia and New Zealand co-hosted FIFA Women's World Cup. The KEEPUP coverage was comprehensive with its social media engagement exceeding that of World Cup rights holders. This included:



14 million

Video views on the Dub at the Cup social hashtag (despite not being a rights holder)



3.5m

article reads on keepup.com.au since July 2023, including the four most read stories since KEEPUP's inception.

Notably, the engagement metrics recorded by KEEPUP through its channels exceeded those of most FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 rights holders.

Throughout the tournament, the Dub Zone team produced daily Dub at the Cup podcasts. Host Teo Pellizzeri was joined by a rotation of some of Australia's most respected football pundits, experts and Liberty A-League stars for daily news, reaction and analysis of the biggest issues and talking points from the global showpiece event. Dub at the Cup became the number 1 most listened to football podcast in Australia.

KEEPUP's coverage of the FIFA Women's World Cup

- 47%** *Increase in average audience per episode compared to those for the FIFA Men's World Cup*
- 168%** *Increase in audience compared to the final month of the A-League season, resulting in a total of 105,287 listens across the tournament*
- 17** *Number of countries in which the podcasts charted*
- 16** *Peak position reached in overall sporting podcast charts in Australia*
- 27** *Number of Liberty A-League stars who appeared on Dub at the Cup to provide their insight*

CHAPTER THREE //

COMMUNITY



3.0 // OVERVIEW

Across Australia and New Zealand, there are upwards of 2.4 million people playing football regularly. This community is the lifeblood of the sport in Australasia and the APL and its clubs are deeply committed to engaging with it to create a thriving A-Leagues ecosystem.

This has been evident throughout 2022-2023 with the implementation of grassroots engagements such as the inaugural A-Leagues Grand Final Trophy Tours, special pre-match activations and marches by local grassroots footballers before the Men's and Women's Grand Finals at CommBank Stadium in Sydney, along with securing the naming rights sponsorship of the

KEEPUP Kanga Cup - Australia's preeminent grassroots football tournament in Canberra.

Another key initiative first introduced by the A-Leagues is the creation of the Liberty Pass. The initiative allows children under the age of 16 the chance to go to any Liberty A-League fixture for free throughout the season to see present and future CommBank Matildas live.

Following the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023, and with the continuation of the Liberty Pass and numerous new initiatives planned, the football community is energised and mobilised ahead of what will be an exciting 2023-24 season across the A-Leagues.

3.1 //

A-Leagues clubs in the Community

The work of all A-Leagues clubs continues to grow and evolve within their respective communities. In season 2022-2023, this work continued across Australia and New Zealand. The work of all clubs in communities ranges from providing football participation opportunities to young girls and boys through to links with community football clubs, school partnerships, visits to country towns, support of local and national charities and providing matchday opportunities for junior community footballers. In total, A-Leagues clubs engaged 353,138 footballers across Australia in schools, community events and promotional experiences.

children across schools, holiday clinics and grassroots clinics in 2022-2023. There were more than 50 individual Brisbane Roar male and female player appearances made across a range of community events.

In December, **Western Sydney Wanderers** officially opened its new five-a-side facility at Wanderers Park with significant funding provided by the NSW Government. The facility is expected to attract 200,000 visitors a year, mostly local community footballers. The Wanderers are particularly excited about the new facility becoming the home ground for diverse multicultural groups, local clubs and associations for years to come.

Brisbane Roar's Roar Active program saw the engagement of more than 8,000

Community participation in A-Leagues club programs

State	Total Participation
NSW	132,215
VIC	81,733
QLD	54,825
SA	41,031
WA	40,060

In April, **Perth Glory** partnered with Foodbank WA and Stirling Macedonia FC to raise funds and collect essential food items on a gameday to assist Foodbank WA in its efforts to help everyday West Australians who normally go without.

In February, **Adelaide United** partnered with the South Australian Produce Market and the State Government to hold a charity football match to raise much needed funds to reduce the distress and hardship of primary producers and small related agricultural businesses impacted by natural disasters including the Murray River flood. The charity match between politicians and horticulture industry leaders took place as a curtain raiser to the Adelaide - Western Sydney game at Coopers Stadium. More than \$150,000 was raised through this event.

Sydney FC has established the Sydney FC Foundation with one pillar of the foundation being the community pillar. The foundation partners with community organisations to improve health and wellbeing, generate meaningful impact through education and child safeguarding, and support of minority groups (e.g. those with disabilities, Indigenous Australians and the multicultural community).

Wellington Phoenix, in partnership with New Zealand's Capital Football, continues to deliver the Football For All programme. This programme has the primary aim of fostering inclusion, participation and hauora (health & wellbeing) by using football as a vehicle. The programme places tamariki and rangatahi from ages six to 17 into football clubs, futsal teams and school teams by removing potential barriers to play such as registration costs, equipment, transportation and communication difficulties for participants.

Melbourne City, through its charitable arm City in the Community, has entered into a unique partnership with The Huddle, to launch GOAL! – a series of innovative football-themed STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) lessons for students working at levels 3-6. GOAL! allows teachers and students to integrate the excitement of football with the critical skills and knowledge found in STEM disciplines. The lessons are aligned with the Australian and Victorian Curriculum and are available for teachers to download for free.

Newcastle Jets has extended its longstanding community partnership with Greater Bank,

which provides for subsidised football programs for children along with visits to local schools. In 2022-2023, this included visits beyond the Hunter region to Gunnedah, Tamworth and Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour. Dozens of schools were visited through the season, reaching many thousands of students.

Melbourne Victory has supported the Afghan Women's National Team to compete in Football Victoria's State League after players from the team fled their home country and arrived in Australia in 2022. Victory has established a comprehensive and elite football program for the team, with the objective of facilitating their return to international competition.

The **Canberra United** Academy fielded teams in the KEEPUP Kanga Cup in mid-2023, with the Capital Football-run annual competition again attracting hundreds of teams and thousands of participants and visitors from across Australia.

The **Central Coast Mariners** ran a series of programs in schools, PCYC's and other charitable organisations focusing on helping at-risk youth back on to the right path. This included a focus on health, nutrition and lifestyle for kids on the Central Coast. This program was kindly supported with new funding from the NSW Government in 2023.

Macarthur FC's renowned Bulls In Schools program was the recipient of \$8m in NSW Government funding over four years to turbocharge delivery of its programs that help with health, socialisation, education as well as providing cost-of-living relief to families who are able to engage their children in the programs free of charge. To date, the Bulls In Schools program has engaged more than 50,000 students across South West Sydney.

Western United's United Football Program continued to engage with and give back to grassroots clubs in the western suburbs of Melbourne as well as Tasmania. The program, championed by former NSL star and WUN community officer David Clarkson, provides clubs with engaging content and templates for holiday training camps and skills training programs, with revenues from the program split between Western United and the host club.

3.2 //

Kanga Cup naming rights

In May, APL's digital platform, KEEPUP, was announced as the naming rights partner for the Kanga Cup, the Southern Hemisphere's largest international youth football tournament.

The KEEPUP Kanga Cup, hosted by Capital Football in Canberra, involves teams and players from around Australia and other parts of the world. In 2023, the tournament consisted of more than 1000 games, 150

Grand Final Trophy Tours

The inaugural Grand Final trophy tours took part throughout April and May, celebrating the Liberty A-League and Isuzu UTE A-Leagues and their respective grand finals. The Liberty A-League Women's championship trophy was taken to seven grassroots clubs throughout Sydney, accompanied by Grand Final Ambassadors Grace Gill and Theresa Polias. More than 650 young football fans had the opportunity to get a photo with the trophy and meet

Grand Final Party

In June, APL hosted its inaugural Grand Final Party, held at Moore Park's Entertainment Quarter on the eve of the Isuzu UTE Grand Final. The event attracted more than 1,500 spectators with grand final teams Melbourne City and Central Coast Mariners presented to the crowd and available for autographs and photos. Fans were able to take part in an E-League exhibition, get photos with the A-League Men's Championship trophy, while a special kids-only clinic attracted more than 150 participants.

A focus of the Grand Final Party was a 5-a-side exhibition on a specially-created pitch. The event featured legends of

Grand Final matchday involvement

In a first for the A-Leagues, community football club junior players were invited to take part in a Grassroots March Past before each of the Women's and Men's Grand Finals held at CommBank Stadium.

referees, 4000 players and 47 football grounds across the Australian Capital Territory.

The Kanga Cup provided an enormous opportunity for KEEPUP to celebrate community footballers through its channels while also promoting the tournament to a wide and diverse audience around Australia, New Zealand and beyond.

some football stars. Many of these young footballers then attended the 2023 Liberty A-League Grand Final.

Similarly, the Isuzu UTE A-League Men's trophy made its way to clubs and schools across Melbourne, Adelaide, Gosford and Sydney with the support of local A-League Men's players, engaging with more than 500 children.

Australian football and the A-Leagues. Melbourne City took on Central Coast in three games – men's, women's and mixed – with teams featuring City and Mariners greats of the past as well as members of City's A-League Women's squad and Central Coast's women's academy.

Fans also had the opportunity to take part in a play-in tournament and given the opportunity to take on some of the greats, before the night rounded out with games between a Matildas Alumni side and A-League Women's Legends, and an A-League Legends versus NSL Legends clash.

For the Liberty A-League Women's Grand Final, some 420 girls from 28 different football clubs took part on the day, some from as far as Dubbo and Newcastle. The junior football participants were from 2022 championship winning teams between the ages of 12 and 16.

For the Isuzu UTE A-League Men's Grand Final, 333 boys and girls from 22 clubs took part. Clubs were selected with support from Football NSW on the basis of their positive engagement with Football Australia's new grassroots Game Changer program.

In addition to the pre-match march pasts, participants from grassroots clubs were provided opportunities to be mascots,

3.3 // Inclusion, Diversity and Engagement

APL is focused on providing accessibility of our Leagues to all irrespective of their race, religion, sexuality, ethnicity or ability. We want everyone to feel they are welcome at our games, are embraced by our actions and respected by our language. More than any other sport in Australia and New Zealand, football is the world game and its power is the ability to engage all no matter where they come from or who they are.

Across the season, APL has engaged with many community groups, charities and representative organisations to demonstrate our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Pride Celebration

From February 24th to 26th in Australia and on March 4th in New Zealand, the A-Leagues held its first ever Pride Celebration Round across all men's and women's games. This inaugural Pride Celebration Round signified the A-Leagues' ongoing commitment to making football accessible and inclusive for everyone. This celebration built on the success of the Adelaide United versus Melbourne Victory Pride Cup game held in 2022. No other professional league in Australia, across both its mens and womens leagues, has ever undertaken a league-wide celebration like this.

An important aspect behind this celebration was research demonstrating that 75%

of LGBTI+ people believe an openly gay spectator would not be very safe attending a sporting event. APL and its clubs want that statistic to improve and ensure all LGBTI+ people have access to a safe and inclusive sporting environment.

The Pride Celebration was the culmination of 18 months of work undertaken by APL and its clubs in conjunction with LBGQTI+ organisation Pride Cup. This included the development and rollout out of a comprehensive training programme for players, staff and executives, a trial of a new stadium safety and inclusion programme with the Melbourne Olympic Parks Trust (MOPT) which was then rolled out nationally, and the introduction of GoBubble technology to help silence online hate for clubs, players and fans.

As part of the Pride Celebration, \$1 from every ticket sold was donated to Pride Cup's community fund to support community clubs and their own Pride events, to help ensure all LGBTI+ people feel included, accepted, and proud to be who they are.

Melbourne Victory and Adelaide United men's and women's teams competed in the 'Pride Cup' - the marquee game of the Pride Celebration - a doubleheader at AAMI Park. This event was generously supported by the Victorian Government and the State Minister for Sport Steve Dimopoulos with \$200,000 in funding.

APL was very proud to have two individuals from across the leagues named as finalists in the 2023 Australian Pride in Sport Awards.



LGBTQ Ally of the Year Award
Marius Zanin, Adelaide United's Marketing and Communications Manager

"Embracing a whole-hearted campaign for LGBTQ inclusion, showcasing their commitment to those who need it most in sport, helping athletes at all levels to live their safest and most authentic lives."



LGBTQ Executive Leader Award
Angela Colless, APL's Inclusion, Diversity and Engagement Manager

"Unwavering commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment for all in football, with her strategic and consultative approach leading to the successful inaugural Pride Celebration, showcasing her passion for equality."

Indigenous football focus

APL has worked with the John Moriarty Foundation (JMF) over the past year as part of its engagement with Indigenous culture. Representation of Indigenous communities in football is increasing, and A-Leagues is committed to ensuring that our game is culturally safe and inclusive at every level.

Established in 2012, the JMF delivers two groundbreaking and interrelated community solutions in remote and regional Australia, Indi Kindi early learning and John Moriarty Football. Every week JMF delivers to over 2,000 Indigenous children in 23 public schools across 19 remote and regional communities in the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales. It is achieving proven progress in 13 of the 17 Closing the Gap targets and A-Leagues is committed to helping JMF continue this significant work.

The JMF-organised Indigenous Football Week (IFW) was the centrepiece of Round 4 of the Isuzu UTE A-League Men 2022-2023 season. JMF's annual flagship event celebrates the power of football to create change for good. IFW brings the football community together to support inclusion, cultural recognition and diversity.

JMF has also established the Indigenous Football Australia Council which is focused on helping create exponential social change through football and ensure more equitable access to football for grassroots and elite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players.

The IFA Council has majority Indigenous members and is gender equal. It is made up of 16 eminent Australians who each bring unique, lived experience, skills, plus, aligned values and goals for Indigenous football in Australia. APL CEO Danny Townsend is a member of this council alongside Craig Foster, Professional Footballers Australia Co-CEOs Kate Gill and Beau Busch, former Socceroos Craig Foster and Travis Dodd, former Matilda Gema Simon and Sydney FC goalkeeper Jada Whyman.

CHAPTER FOUR //

CORPORATE

4.0 // OVERVIEW

Since its foundation in 2021, Australian Professional Leagues (APL) has built the foundations for continued, sustainable growth, including a new broadcast deal, a record length Collective Bargaining Agreement, new naming rights partners in Isuzu UTE and Liberty Financial, a new digital infrastructure and investment from global leaders in technology investing Silver Lake, and three new teams in the Liberty A-League Women.

Part of these foundations are an expanded board. In August 2022, leading global

4.1 //

Board appointments

APL has made two important appointments to its Board of Directors that add enormous skills and experiences to the organisation.

In September 2023, Stephen Conroy, a former senior Federal Minister, was appointed as APL's first independent chair. Stephen, who was a long time Federal Minister for Communications and Leader of the Government in the Senate, was selected after a search by an international recruitment firm. He brings with him a wealth of experience and political capital as well as national recognition and a lifelong love of football. Stephen will be an important advocate for the A-Leagues and football more broadly.

Paul Lederer, who has been the Chair of APL since its establishment, will remain on the Board.

In August 2022, Ebru Köksal, a leading figure in European and global football circles, joined the Board as Football Australia's nominated appointment. Ebru has acted in

football administrator Ebru Köksal became APL's FA-appointed board member. In September 2023, Stephen Conroy was appointed as an independent chair, and the APL is seeking an additional independent director.

The APL has welcomed a series of new commercial partners and celebrated a number of renewed partnerships, including naming rights partner Liberty, hotel partner IHG and Finals Series partner Seiko.

senior executive and advisory roles for FIFA and UEFA, various football associations, the UK's Professional Footballers' Association and as CEO of Turkish giants Galatasaray.

An advocate for women's football and gender equality, and current chair of Women in Football UK, Köksal is a senior advisor at the investment management firm J. Stern & Co, where she advises on the football finance transactions and manages relations with wealth management clients.

While working with FIFA, she led their Women's Football Administration Course in 2015 as well as the Female Leaders in Football Workshop in 2016 on behalf of Football Australia. She was the first woman to be elected to the Executive Board of the European Club Association in 2011.

Prior to working in the football industry, Köksal had a decade-long investment banking career with Morgan Stanley, Citibank and AIG Capital partners.

4.2 //

Expansion strategy

APL is focused on expanding the number of clubs across Australia and New Zealand in order to maximise engagement with football fans, provide increased professional football pathways and optimise commercial opportunities. Central Coast Mariners will join the Liberty A-League in season 2023/2024, making it a twelve team league. This follows the introduction of women's teams from Wellington Phoenix and Western United over the past two seasons. These expansion steps have increased the number of contracted players in the Liberty A-League from 180 to 270 in five years while also allowing the league season to be extended to 22 rounds, providing more game time for players.

APL announced in March its intention to expand the A-Leagues further with new expansion clubs planned for Canberra and Auckland (incorporating both men's and women's programs) growing both leagues to 14 teams.

The process for the Canberra and Auckland expansions is well-advanced with strong interest from investors. An extensive due diligence and consultation program has been undertaken in both markets. Local football organisations, governments and potential investors have been core to this consultation. It is expected that teams 13 and 14 will enter the A-Leagues in season 2024/2025.

In the longer term, early assessments are being undertaken of geographical markets for the addition of teams 15 and 16 into the A-Leagues. This work is ongoing and will help support APL to continue to maximise community, football and commercial opportunities.

Major engagement events have included:

- A-Leagues Players & Pollies games at Federal Parliament in September 2022
- Liberty A-League Women Players & Pollies Game at Parramatta Stadium in April 2023
- Parliament of NSW Isuzu UTE A-League Men Grand Final Reception in June 2023
- Liberty A-Leagues Players & Pollies Game at Federal Parliament in August 2023

These government meetings and events are in addition to the regular operational interactions APL and its clubs have with

police, government owned stadium managers and other government service providers.

In 2023, APL developed its first ever major funding submission to the Australian Federal Government. Focused on growing the Liberty A-League Women and the pathways into professional women's football, the *More Visible, More Possible* co-investment strategy was provided to the government in June 2023.

4.3 //

Continuing to strengthen commercial partnerships

Building on existing partnerships and working with like-minded brands and organisations who are committed to growing football continues to be a core focus.

Liberty Financial extended their partnership with A-Leagues following a successful two seasons as naming rights partner. Liberty will remain a naming rights partner for the A-League Women's and a major sponsor of the Isuzu UTE A-League into the 2023-24 season.

The introduction of the Liberty A-League Pass saw more than 9,000 girls under 16 sign up for free entry to A-Leagues Women's games in Season 2022-2023. Following its success, the initiative has been expanded for Season 2023-24.

The A-Leagues also acknowledges its other valued partners across the 2022-2023 season including McDonald's, Neds, Paramount ANZ, SEN, NIKE, Priceline, DonatLife and PSC Insurance.

A new partnership with Destination NSW came to life via various new Grand Final week activities culminating in the main events, including a record crowd of 9,519 at the Liberty A-League Grand Final and a sold-out Isuzu UTE A-League Men's Grand Final. The partnership included a series of supporting events, including a panel event on 'Growing the Visibility of Women's Sport' with speakers from Football Australia, NewsCorp and Paramount ANZ, and a 'Grand Final Party' with a centrepiece tournament featuring former star players and attended by a large number of fans.

4.4 //

Developing strong relationships with governments

Since its establishment in early 2021, APL has undertaken the important task of developing relationships with governments across Australia and New Zealand. Ensuring there is awareness of the APL and its objectives across ministerial offices as well as government departments and agencies

is vital to the ongoing success of the organisation. Over the past 12 months, there has been an extensive schedule of meetings and events with Federal and State Ministers, their advisers and senior departmental executives.





LEAGUES

**AUSTRALIAN
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