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L I B E R I O
C O N S U L T I N G

FOOTBALL PLAYER SCOUTING IN AUSTRALIA

A CURRENT SNAPSHOT

A RESEARCH PAPER BY
PETER PALEOLOGOS



INTRODUCTION

Is there any football player scouting in Australia?

This simple question underlies the motivation by Libero Consulting to conduct the first Australian research study into the local football scouting ecosystem.

The Football Federation Australia also confirmed that it holds no record or register of professional football scouts operating in Australia.

This is essentially the aim of this important piece of research: to ascertain the current status of football scouting operations in Australia.



(“Football”) Scouts are everywhere yet nowhere, faceless and nameless, despite making the informed decisions worth millions

- Michael Calvin, *‘The Nowhere Men’* A deep dive into the world of football scouting.



About Us

Peter Paleologos is a leading Australian player agent and registered football intermediary with the Football Federation Australia and a football lawyer. He is the founder of Libero Consulting and has over 10 years experience as a player agent, adviser and football consultant. Peter has worked on both A-League and International deals, football consulting projects and has wide range of contacts worldwide. Peter's credentials include, amongst other things, former president of the Australian Football Agents Association, on the editorial committee for Football Legal (the international journal for football lawyers) and he has been recently appointed as a FIFA Pro Bono Legal Counsel.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL SCOUTING REPORT:

- *To gather insights, trends, and a current snapshot of the Australian football scouting ecosystem*
- *To navigate through a disparate talent identification system to understand the scouting landscape*
- *To stimulate stakeholders discussion concerning developing solutions to improve the local scouting systems*



Methodology and Data

THE RESEARCH AND QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THIS STUDY WAS CONDUCTED BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 2019 and MARCH 2020

✓ **ENGAGED WITH AUSTRALIAN STAKEHOLDERS BY EMAIL OR TELEPHONE WITH A SPECIFIC SCOUTING QUESTIONNAIRE**

Over 70 responses were received from various Australian Stakeholders

✓ **REVIEWED SCOUTING FRAMEWORKS AND FOOTBALL PLAYER SCOUTING MODELS**

WYSCOUT PLATFORM AND COUNTRY CASE STUDIES: *England, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and Denmark*

✓ **SELECTED LITERATURE REVIEW**

- *Talent Scouting: An Experience Capital approach - CIES Football Observatory monthly report*

- *How do international youth transfers in football impact talent development? - Laurenz Van Looveren, Matteo Balliauw and Sunčica Vujić*

- *Instat Report 'Argentina 2016 best players scouting report'*

- *Scoutlab football scouting reports by Mellemand.com*

- *FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA (FFA) : Australia youth development presentation 2019 – Sean Douglas*

- *Actions speak louder than goals: valuing player actions in soccer – SCI SPORTS 2019*

- *The Scouted Football handbooks - 2016-2019 editions*

- *Podcasts and Q & A articles concerning A-League scouting: Newcastle Jets and Perth Glory*

A definition of football player scouting

“Scouting” is simple in theory. Difficult in practice.

For example, all 20 English Premier League clubs deploy global scouting networks to unearth hidden gems, sifting through thousands of footballers eager to play in the wealthiest club competition in world football. But judging ability is tricky. Some traits, such as speed and strength, are measurable. But other variables, such as the ability to control a ball under pressure, are near impossible to assess empirically. Scouts deploy no fixed tests. They watch matches, then attempt to decipher which players have what it takes!

‘How to scout a football team’, Financial Times

1 November 2018

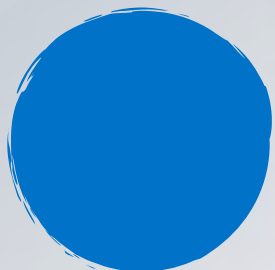
Stakeholders engaged

Libero Consulting engaged with various Australian football stakeholders who were surveyed for this report



Football Federation Australia

Input was obtained from Rob Sherman (FFA Technical Director) as to whether there is an Australian Register of Official player scouts



A-League and NPL clubs

A-League club football departments, and NPL clubs were approached to ascertain whether their clubs appointed professional scouts



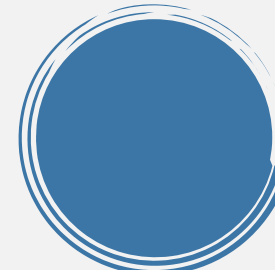
Player Agents and Football Intermediaries

A plethora of FFA Registered Football intermediaries and Australian Player Agents were approached to ascertain whether they were aware of scouts in Australia or had acted as a club scout



Coaches

Both Football Coaches Australia and independent Australian football coaches were approached to ascertain whether they were aware of club scouts within Australian football

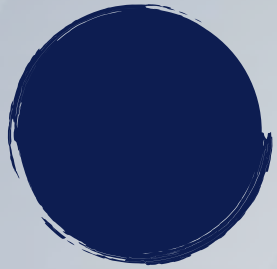


Private Football Academies

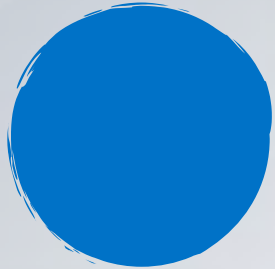
A varied array of private academies from most of the states of Australia were approached to confirm whether they were scouting for international clubs or had appointed scouts

Significant Findings

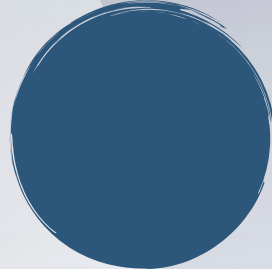
Based on analysis of stakeholders' responses, Libero Consulting has identified and articulated five (5) significant findings which define the current state of the Australian football scouting landscape:



69% of stakeholders responded that they **were not aware** of any club scouts operating in Australia



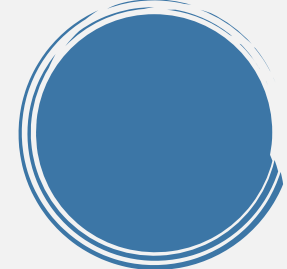
8% of stakeholders responded that they **were aware** of club scout appointments or they were appointed as scouts for clubs



22% of stakeholders responded that they **were aware** of clubs appointing scouts in Australia



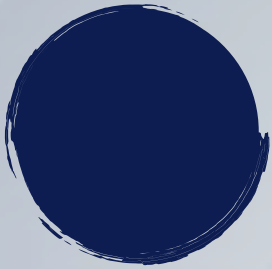
11% of stakeholders responded that they **were aware** that the coaching staff of A-League club and NPL clubs engaged in scouting activity



12% of stakeholders responded that they **were aware** that agents acted as scouts in some capacity on behalf of A-League clubs

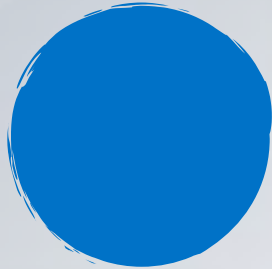
Additional Findings

The research also identified other practices and characteristics that appeared within the sparse Australian football scouting landscape



Anonymous Scouts

Clubs in Australia tend to keep the name of their scouts confidential and private



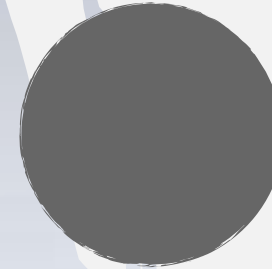
No Budget to appoint scouts

A-League clubs do not have the funds that international clubs have to appoint scouts nor do they have the financial means to provide scouting infrastructure like dormitories to host youth players they are trialing



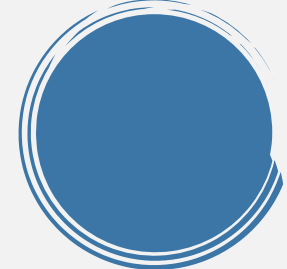
Understanding scouting

Few football people in Australia have worked at the top end of talent recruitment therefore may not understand scouting. Further many have never played at the highest levels in Europe/South America so do not understand the scouting niche



International clubs do not regard Australia as a scouting country

Most International clubs don't have sufficient budgets to allocate scouts to the Australian market due to its size and value relative to other countries

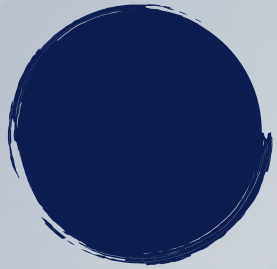


Clubs do not see a return on investment by scouting

A-League clubs miss the opportunity to increase their income through player transfers, training compensation and solidarity mechanisms

OBSERVATIONS AND TRENDS

Several common observations and trends were also identified from the research



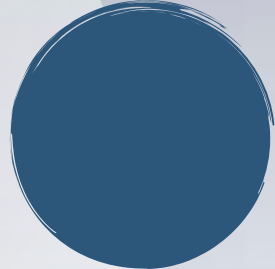
Opposition analysts scouts appointed

FFA and Sydney Olympic have appointed scouts to analyse matches involving opposition teams or complete dossiers on the opposition



Foreign national team scouts

Australian Player Agents have scouted Australian players for the national teams of Lebanon and Malaysia (as Australian players had the heritage of these nations)



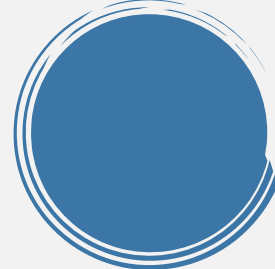
Many wannabee football persons misrepresent themselves as scouts

Australia-wide there is a plethora of people who purport to act as scouts however most do not have official role with a club



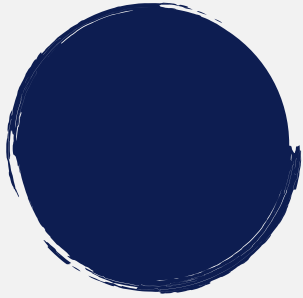
Scouting initiatives were more common in the past

FFA used to have a scout (2011-2013) that covered Sydney to scout players ie. skilleroos, John Kosmina former Adelaide United coach had a scouting adviser, as did David Mitchell as Parramatta Power coach (NSL)



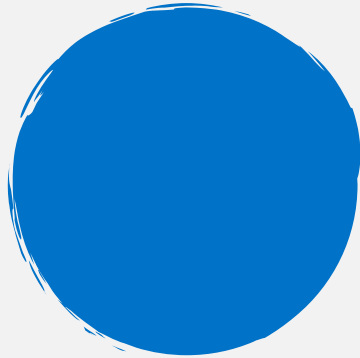
Clubs do not cast the scouting net wide enough

Therefore many technically gifted players are regularly overlooked in Australia because they may be a little unpolished athletically or tactically



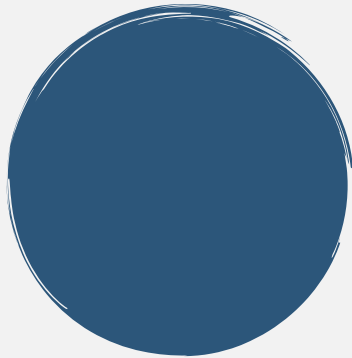
Melbourne City FC

Anecdotally, have youth player scouts and a scout with English background based in Melbourne



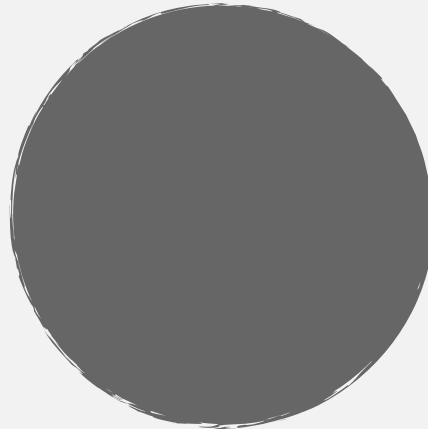
Melbourne Victory

Had a scout contracted in Europe to scout mainly foreign players



Western Sydney Wanderers

Had a scout based in Germany in the 2018/2019 A-League season

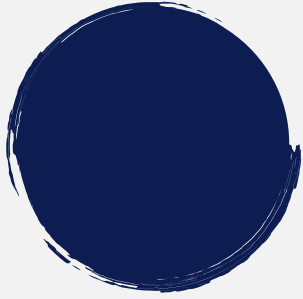


Newcastle Jets

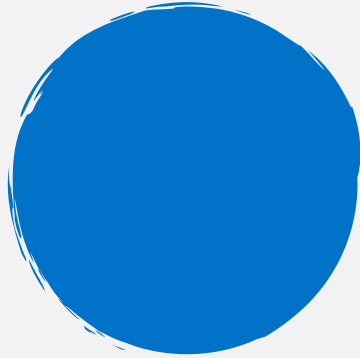
Had a scout based in Belgium on a 6-month casual basis tasked with identifying Australian footballers playing in Europe

A-League Club Scouting

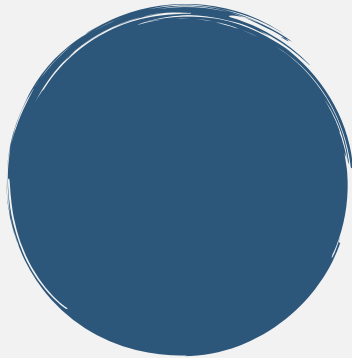
Several A-League clubs have made a one-off short term scouting appointment, or have active football scouts



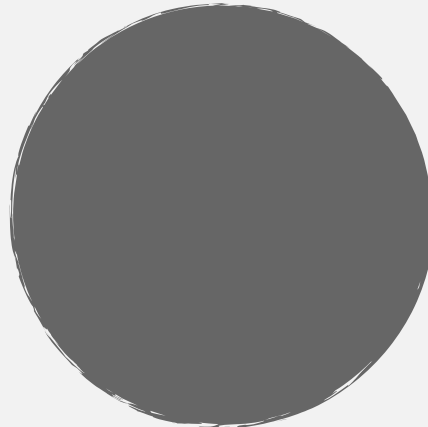
FC Utrecht and
Feyenoord
Rotterdam



Hercules de
Alicante CF and
Atletico Madrid



Atalanta BC and
several Italian clubs
seeking youth
players for the
Italian Primavera
(under 19 clubs)



Derby County
and scouts based
in Australia with
UK heritage
referring players
to English clubs

International Football Club Scouts in Australia

There have been several
instances where Australian based
scouts have been appointed by
international clubs

What role do stakeholders play within the Australian scouting ecosystem

The research indicates that three (3) significant stakeholders impact player scouting outcomes in Australia

Clubs

- Most A-League clubs use Wyscout to scout professional players
- FFA have stipulated in the proposed Academy criteria that A-League clubs would have to keep a register of scouts, they would have to be police-checked and have ID available for the parents
- It has been suggested that Sydney FC have a first right of refusal agreement with Ajax for their players
- A Talent ID camp in Melbourne which brought out coaches and scouts from over 20 European clubs provided one of the rare opportunities for Australian players to be scouted locally



Player Agents and Football Intermediaries

- Player agents are the main source of player referrals for A-League clubs
- They have relationships with coaches and provide detailed lists of players to A-League clubs during the player transfer windows
- Agents have been appointed scouts for particular transfer windows by clubs such as Wellington Phoenix, Newcastle Jets and Sydney FC
- Previously, the AIS and national youth state championships were scouting opportunities where Agents could assess players



Coaches

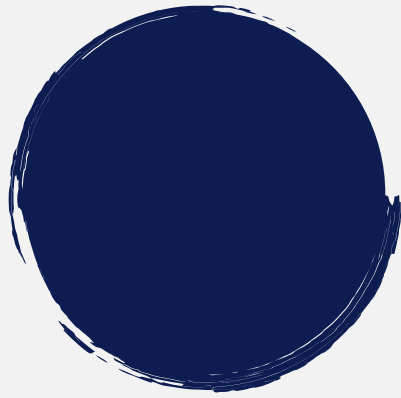
- Occasionally and on an ad-hoc basis coaching staff from A-League clubs go and watch a nominated player who is dominating at the NPL level
- There is a trend of A-League coaches going to Europe in the A-League off-season to scout both Australian and foreign players
- Are watching players and making decisions on them, and these are either head coaches, assistant coaches, football directors, youth coaches, or people at the clubs that are generally part of the football department
- Rely on contacts or close associates as player referrers

International football player scouting platforms: Analytics, big data and player index tools



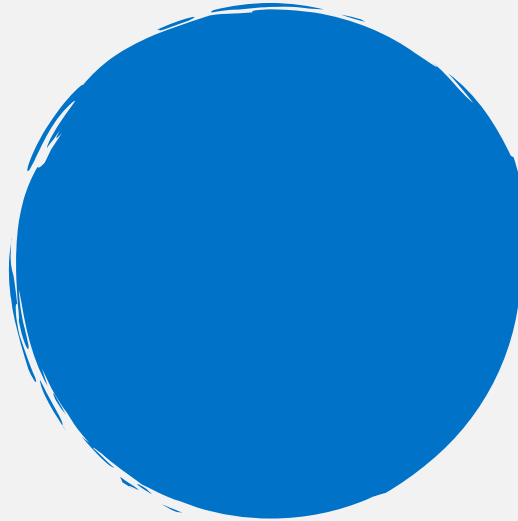
The consequences of not having developed player scouting systems in Australia

The lack of an organised, vibrant and transparent scouting ecosystem in Australia has resulted in many youth players having to turn to paying private operators to pursue their dream as a professional footballer



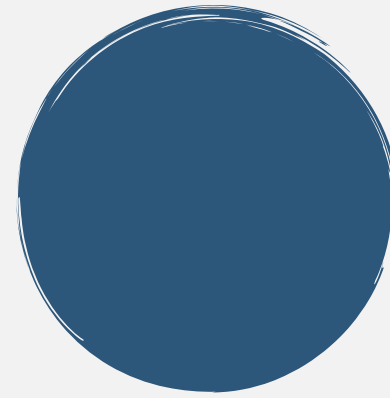
Private academies
linked to clubs do not
always have official
scouts

Many private academies who operate under international club brands do not necessarily have official scouts appointed by the parent international club



Player Talent ID
Trial companies

Some Australian parents pay considerable talent identification camp fees in Sydney and Melbourne in order for their sons to be invited to Europe for Camps/Assessments without any end result



Paying agent fixers
for professional
opportunities

Parents have paid huge upfront fees to agent (fixers) to onboard, train, feed and accommodate their sons and get them on the lower rungs of the professional football ladders in places such as Belgium, Scandinavia, Spain, Serbia, England and Scotland

Recommendations - Next Steps

What steps should be taken by Australian football stakeholders to improve the football scouting frameworks and scene?

DEVELOP FOOTBALL SCOUTING COURSES

For coaches, football intermediaries/player agents and aspiring football scouts to be accredited in player talent identification

BUILD LOCAL FOOTBALL SCOUTING PLATFORMS TO IMPROVE YOUTH FOOTBALL SCOUTING

There is no information database or positional rankings of the best Australian youth players (top 50 in each age group and in each respective position)

GROW SHOWCASE OPPORTUNITIES

Bring international club scouts to Australia and promote showcase events like trial combines and elite youth tournaments

Future research themes and initiatives to be considered

- Football Federation Australia should consider setting up a permanent youth training base in Europe for Australian players (*David Magone ex-Premier League scout proposed this model*)
- A group of Australian investors had previously revealed that they were keen to purchase a European league club where Australian youth talents can develop in the local competition
- Research the impact that NPL club partnerships with top European clubs (*Sydney Olympic/FC Schalke 04 and Marconi/Borussia Dortmund*) have on Australian youth player opportunities
- Consider a pilot scheme to appoint a panel of successful former elite NSL and A-League players who have played internationally as youth football scouts throughout Australia
- Canberra produced nine (9) Socceroos however no A-League scouts have been scouting in Australia's capital. A short prototype scouting trial should be set up in Canberra to test and ascertain world best practice scouting frameworks which may then be implemented as a national program in rest of Australia
- A qualitative review into the United States of America College scouting companies (market segment) based in Australia who recruit young Australian players onto scholarship, in order to ascertain the percentage of players who effectively transition into professional clubs in the USA

CONCLUSION

The findings discovered by this study may present a bleak picture as to the current state of football player scouting in Australia.

However, they also present a compelling opportunity for Australian football stakeholders to improve the football scouting ecosystem, and to pivot towards better scouting outcomes on behalf of talented young Australian footballers.

THANK YOU

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Peter Paleologos thanks and acknowledges all contributors to this seminal report on Australian football player scouting. All the names of stakeholders who contributed have been kept private and confidential.

This research report is not intended as criticism of any stakeholder including the FFA, A-League clubs, NPL clubs, international clubs, player agents/football intermediaries, coaches or private academies.