



# INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL CLUB TRIALS : *THE COMPETITIVE SCENE CONFRONTING AUSTRALIAN PLAYERS*

This research study surveys the international football player agents perspective on club player trials. Further, the study presents the significant challenges and factors that young talented Australian male footballers face when trialing for a international club professional contract.

# INTRODUCTION



Over the last decade, I have observed a common trend whereby a huge cohort of aspiring and talented male Australian young footballers have not succeeded at their trial for a first or second professional club contract. This pattern has arisen regardless whether the trial was at a European, Australian, Asian, North American or South American club.

Subsequently, this adverse development has raised significant concerns in the Australian youth football player development scene. As it has become apparent that most talented young male Australian footballers are not prepared for the rigours, technical/tactical requirements and club profile considerations that relate to international professional football club trials.

## A Research Study

As a consequence, I have engaged into a short research study to investigate and obtain insights from a plethora of international player agents to ascertain the reasons why talented younger players **succeed or not** at a club trial. Further, my research seeks to identify country trends and seeks to develop a best practice guide to assist Australian players attending future international level club trials.



# ABOUT US

**Peter Paleologos** is the founder of Libero Consulting, an Australian based football player management agency and consultancy. He is a registered football intermediary and player agent with Football Federation Australia and a Football Lawyer. He is currently the Co-President of the Australian Football Agents Association Inc. Peter is also the Australian delegate to the European Football Agents Association, and is a FIFA appointed pro bono counsel to provide legal aid services to players and coaches who may face disciplinary hearings. Peter is on the editorial committee for *Football Legal*, the international journal for football lawyers and has written more than 20 articles on Australian, Asian and New Zealand football law and regulatory matters. Peter recently released an e-book namely *'The Australian Youth Footballer's Regulatory Guide'* published by Fair Play Publishing. Peter also has a Masters in Sports Business from Victoria University, and recently completed the 'The Business of Entertainment, Media and Sports' executive course at Harvard University Business School.

# OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The **Objectives** of this research study are to:

- Obtain an international insight from a cohort of international player agents into the significant reasons why talented young football players succeed at professional football club trials;
- Present the international player agents perspective as to the reasons why talented young football players are not successful at an international club trial;
- Provide relevant best practice benchmark trial guidance for younger Australian talented male footballers;
- Survey a respected cohort of player agents **(60)** from a wide range of countries to discover an expansive viewpoint and collate data;
- Ascertain trialing cultures, challenges and trialing trends across various international football markets; and
- Explore why football player agents are still the key driver for young players getting an international professional club trial.

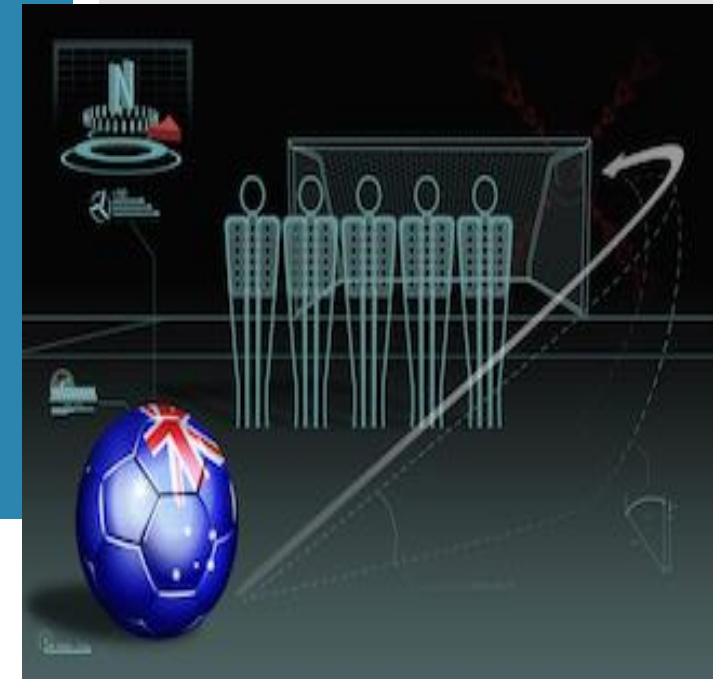


# METHODOLOGY AND DATA

*'Did you know that up to 95% of football player professional trials end in rejection? That's more than 9 out of 10 times the player and those who believe in the player and wish him or her the best get disappointed. But it is not just disappointment and it is not just the player and their side who lose. The whole process leaves a lot of "losers" behind. In case of rejection the club loses time and money, the player's agent loses money and credibility and the player loses an opportunity and their reputation. There are not many winners in this equation.'* by Mikko Perala, CEO of Player Accelerator, Player Agent and Impact Entrepreneur

The above observation from a close colleague was one of the inspirations for me to undertake this study, in order to ascertain why an overwhelming proportion of younger Australian footballers (*I define a talented younger player as someone between 17 to 22 years of age*) were not performing at professional international club trials thereby not achieving a professional playing deal. **As a consequence, I designed a two-fold survey model to conduct this study.** Firstly, a questionnaire was sent to various international player agents to obtain their response. Secondly, a ten (10) question survey via the [SurveyMonkey platform](#) was conducted to obtain the international football player agents' perspective on various youth player trialing outcomes and propositions.

(\* The pictures for this study were purchased from [stockunlimited.com](#))





60 player agents from 50 countries and leagues were surveyed for this research study



## PART A

20 International player agents from key football markets were asked for written responses to five (5) detailed questions for this report



# Q1 - What are the 3-4 significant factors/reasons you have come across (in your country) which results in a talented younger player being offered a professional contract after a trial? (Table A)

Spain	<p>The player demonstrating extreme determination, quick adaptation and of course the necessary level to play with the team with which he is trialing including a. Physicality (speed, power), b. Aggressiveness c. Coachability, and a desire to learn</p> <p>Further, clubs are assessing the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hunger of player, if he is determinate and has willingness to go forward in his game</li> <li>• Passport situation and team situation on player position</li> <li>• Level displayed at a short time and self-confidence of player when coming from a smaller (low profile) football country</li> </ul>
USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Player fits the club's system, philosophy and the player is coachable</li> <li>• Player adds to what they already have (provides a difference)</li> <li>• Player doesn't have too much luggage attached (cost, high maintenance, entourage etc.)</li> <li>• Player can be seen getting into the first team early and making an impact</li> </ul>
South East Asian Leagues (Vietnam/Malaysia/Singapore/Indonesia/Thailand& Hong Kong)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right Attitude, aptitude &amp; mentality</li> <li>• Willingness to take criticism/feedback &amp; improve</li> <li>• Demonstrates a certain level of maturity uncommon amongst his peers- both on &amp; off the pitch</li> <li>• Demonstrates discipline- eat, rest &amp; train well; no clubbing/alcohol/smoking/binging</li> <li>• Adaptability to the new environment - in that can the player overcome language/cultural barriers</li> <li>• Independence - can the player overcome homesickness; being thousands of miles away from his family/loved ones/friends?</li> <li>• Can he manage to take care of himself- food/living/washing laundry/pay bills etc</li> <li>• Willing to give to sacrifice to fulfill his dream. How far is he willing to go?</li> <li>• Coaches may see a lot of potential in certain players, that are raw diamonds to be polished anyway so there is still time to mould and nurture them</li> <li>• Players that have good characteristic and commitment</li> </ul>
England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competent technical ability, hard work and dedication during training sessions, taking on instructions and implementing them to the letter</li> <li>• Good fitness and athleticism to be able to match players currently at the club</li> <li>• Outstanding talent/ability however not necessarily potential</li> <li>• Known interest from other clubs, economic and squad situation at the club (e.g. a squad place to fill on a limited budget)</li> </ul>



# Q1 - What are the 3-4 significant factors/reasons you have come across which results in a talented younger player being offered a professional contract after a trial? (Table B)

Scotland	Basically it's just down to ability, athleticism and mentality
Germany	Speed, technique and something that makes him unique plus the potential the club can see
Belgium	Clubs are looking for an exceptional talent: strength, speed, height, pace, power, technique, dribble, acceleration. It is not always enough to be a good player but if the player has one or two exceptional qualities they get often a contract offer
Smaller European Leagues (Cyprus/Greece/Israel/Lithuania/Finland/Sweden)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Situation in the club, how many players for his position is and how much better he is compared the ones who are in club</li> <li>• Future expectation/evaluation about players coming years development ability</li> <li>• If player is good enough then financial terms. Is it possible within the budget or not</li> <li>• A young player is offered a trial easier if he is coming from a country that has a good reputation of developing players or if you prefer good football schools for example France or Netherlands</li> <li>• Players that are EU passport holders make it easier to travel because of cheaper flights and no documentation for visas and not a lot of paperwork required</li> <li>• Also there is exposure of EU players (compared to say Australians) or it is much easier to gather information and data about them</li> <li>• Player has very good quality on current age and has better quality than all current local players on his position (if the player is from abroad)</li> <li>• Player has future. Examples: sport director see that it is possible to make money on a future transfer. Head coach sees player in first squad in near future</li> </ul>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National youth team player</li> <li>• Contact offers by many clubs, upgraded contract by trialing club (play with reserve team at the age of 16 or train with the professional squad at 18)</li> <li>• No injury</li> </ul>
Argentina	1- Innate talent 2- look professional and serious 3- Good biotype

## Q2 - What are the 3-4 significant factors/reasons you have come across which results in a talented younger player not being offered a professional contract after a trial? (*Table A*)

Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not making the required in game impact. Not being determined enough. Not offering better than what the club already has in the players position.</li> <li>• a. lack of game understanding b. lack of tactical awareness c. lack of competitiveness (too innocent, lacking in character) d. very poor decision making</li> <li>• Team already has a lot of talented players in the position the player is trialing, having to add extra budget into that team for a player that will not add nothing to the squad</li> <li>• Player is not confident and once trainings start he does not show himself and hides during trainings trying not to touch the ball</li> <li>• Player does not listen or show interest in training session as he is used to be the N°1 player in the coming country, but does not adjust well to a squad full of high level players</li> </ul>
USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Player is too “raw” (too many bad habits)</li> <li>• Disagreement between directors and coaches on the level of the player</li> </ul>
South East Asian Leagues (Vietnam/Malaysia/ Singapore/Indonesia/ Thailand & Hong Kong)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian players who came to Asian market especially South East Asia and Hong Kong tend to be good however sometime clubs need something extra special</li> <li>• The Thailand league usually looking for experimented players (25-29 year old) therefore for youngsters player’s priority is for Thai national’s players</li> <li>• Too many foreign players already in Vietnam, player has to be exceptional to get ahead of either Brazilian/Spanish technically gifted players, or strong bid defensive African type players - (This is a huge aspect of the Vietnamese club psyche)</li> </ul>
England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not adhering to instructions during sessions</li> <li>• Lack of football intelligence and knowledge in game play</li> <li>• Difficulty in performing technical drills during training sessions</li> <li>• Lack of fitness and athleticism</li> <li>• Disciplinary record (off the field of play) and reputation</li> <li>• Compensation due to another club</li> <li>• Family Situation (varies between club to club) and conduct of player’s family</li> </ul>

## Q2 - What are the 3-4 significant factors/reasons you have come across which results in a talented younger player not being offered a professional contract after a trial? (Table B)

Scotland	If players start over thinking the trial this will mess their heads up and result in non-performance
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Player is not better than the players the club has in the youth team</li> <li>• If a club signs a player from abroad they want a player to be extraordinary</li> </ul>
Belgium	Budget, already players of a similar level on the same position, player trialing is good but nothing special or exceptional
Smaller European Leagues (Cyprus/Greece/Israel/Lithuania/Finland/Sweden)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Players motivation, how he seems to be ready for long term work</li> <li>• Good player but not good enough for current club</li> <li>• Local player on this position they have is better than trialed one</li> <li>• Coaching Staff do not see any future potential</li> </ul>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant Injury</li> <li>• Regular player (Not good but not bad)</li> <li>• Smaller, less powerful player than other players in the group</li> <li>• The club do not need more players at the moment for this position</li> </ul>
Argentina	1- Does not impress in the first moments 2- Not in good shape 3- Their way of playing is <u>NOT</u> understood. 4- Many players try-out in positions that are not for them

### Q3 - What impact does a unsuccessful professional football contract trial, have on the player and their player agent/football intermediary? (Table A)

Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Player can take it in one of two ways, let it get them down and dishearten them to the point where they give up and no longer believe they can make it, or they increase their levels and determination and fight even harder to make a success of their next opportunity</li> <li>• Football is after all just a game of opinions and no two people think exactly the same about something on a player</li> <li>• A failed trial can also have an effect on the relationship between player and agent but it depends on how strong the bond is between the two and how much belief and determination exists on both parts</li> <li>• There is no impact on the player other than for the club and its staff confirming that said player is not at the level</li> <li>• There is a bigger impact for the agent as he/she may be considered by the coaching staff or sporting direction as lacking in sufficient knowledge of the level required by the club, or general football knowledge as a whole</li> <li>• An unsuccessful trial can create a lot of negativity into the player, as a rejection in life is always difficult to handle, and as players have in a high percentage of bad attitudes, that could end up breaking the relationship between the Agent and the Player as player might think it is all because Agent did not do the right work</li> <li>• Player gives up and decides to go back to his home country where he is treated as he believes he deserves</li> </ul>
USA	Impact depends on the relationship the agent has with the club, could lead to the club not really trusting the agent's opinions anymore
South East Asian Leagues (Vietnam/Malaysia/Singapore/Indonesia/Thailand& Hong Kong)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within Indonesian context, some players are like a ghost and not loyal and they only come with the attitude of what they need and try to do something behind the scenes at the expense of the agent</li> <li>• Depends on individuals. Some sulk, prefer to play safe and stay home to play domestic football. Some use it as a launchpad to obtain other trials. For example, a player may claim that he was trialing with this or that top club and use that as a reference tool for their next stop</li> <li>• For the agent/intermediary, some just remain uncontactable after a failed trial. If the risk pays off, then their reputation will be enhanced. It is difficult and it is a big gamble as young players are generally more unstable and unpredictable than the older established players</li> </ul>
Belgium	Regarding the impact of failed trials on the agent, is that you only have a few chances for trials as an agent. If it is good (and transfer the player for example), then you can take some failures. If consistently the first players you send to trial fail to get a contract you will probably no longer get a chance to promote your players

### Q3 - What impact does a unsuccessful professional football contract trial, have on the player and their player agent/football intermediary? (Table B)

England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The player would be worried about whether the Agent would still be prepared to offer him or seek other trial opportunities</li> <li>• Depends on the player - some will go 'into their shell' for weeks (if not longer), some will be fired up for another go and prove the club wrong and succeed elsewhere. Some will just get bitter and angry after each unsuccessful trial</li> <li>• A player should never turn down a trial an agent has set up for them (unless they had told the agent; 'no' to a club before trial arrangement)</li> <li>• For players a short period of quiet reflection is best, then go again (but don't try too hard ..... it shows and usually has a negative impact)</li> <li>• The agent would question the player's ability to secure a contract in the professional game in the future</li> <li>• If the intermediary truly cares they will share the disappointment (although not readily show it), good agents/intermediaries care. If an agent cannot be contacted by the player after an unsuccessful trial, the player should be wary of the agent</li> <li>• The intermediary shouldn't be hassled repeatedly by the player, but the intermediary should be there as support if required</li> <li>• Concerning the Player-Intermediary Relationship : It is vitally important agent and player communicate honestly and openly about what they think went wrong and how they both can improve on the next trial opportunity</li> </ul>
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a negative impact. The player is labeled. People say (and it is a small world in football): He was at club x and they did not want him. He can't be that good</li> <li>• It is bad for his agent too because next time it may be more difficult for the agent to get a player to the club for a trial</li> </ul>
Smaller European Leagues (Cyprus/Greece/Israel/Lithuania/Finland/Sweden)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone has his own opinion and if they say that player is not for them they can also make a mistake - it is normal</li> <li>• If the player is good but not suit for one club he may suit another another club</li> <li>• If the player doesn't succeed you understand that you as an agent, intermediary scout or whatever may lose credibility, especially if it really doesn't work and the player leaves a bad impression football-wise</li> </ul>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very difficult for the player and for the agent to find another club/trial</li> <li>• Usually agents do not care about free players</li> </ul>
Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The impact usually is bad if a negative answer become a usual occurrence</li> <li>• Player and agent start feeling tired from each other</li> </ul>



## Q3b - Are clubs giving proper feedback/instructions on how the player may improve his game to either the player or his player agent? (*supplementary question*)

### Is feedback given on why trialist was unsuccessful

- Clubs do not give proper feedback or instructions, just the bare basics, and only aim to observe and assess the player. Clubs are reluctant to provide information in the form of feedback that could be misconstrued or misinterpreted, which could then be misused against them
- Very rarely have clubs given any proper instruction or guidance to player (or intermediary) after an unsuccessful trial
- Most of the time the coaches feel that players on a trial are a waste of time and energy and therefore are also often overlooked
- In most cases the clubs don't give a proper feedback. Often the player or agent gets no feedback at all and this means: 'We are not interested!'. In Argentina, if you don't succeed, the club is not going to give you any advice in how to improve
- In some trials, the club official simply won't tell what went wrong as believe players are desperate therefore treat them irrationally
- Some agent never proactively seek feedback shortly after a trial as (i) emotions/adrenaline are high, (ii) give people time to think, and to reflect, (iii) often busy times for all

### What feedback/instruction may actually be given

- Most of the feedback given is very similar and of little or no substance (to soften the blow or make excuses), Agents, would always prefer open and honest feedback even (if critical) than false platitudes. If a player agent sends a player to good level club, they will agree with the club before sending them that feedback is a must
- Some clubs offer advice/feedback/guidance – but it is not necessarily from the person who makes the decision
- Usually Clubs do not give a lot of information on why they dismiss a player, they just say the coaches do not think it will fit in well into the team, or they already have that spot covered with guaranteed players
- Some clubs provide detailed feedback via printed reports to the players. It really depends on the professionalism of the clubs though and how much attention/energy they pay to youth development/recruitment
- Sometimes the player will get some pretext from the club official like: 'We can't sign you now because we don't have enough budget, but maybe next time'. In some cases, clubs follow the player to see if there is further development

*"Generally, it is unlikely most international clubs will give detailed feedback and guidance to a young football player who has had an unsuccessful trial"*

## Q4 - For what period of time, should a talented youth player trial before the club decides on whether to offer a professional first team contract? *(Table A)*

Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The minimum should be one week with a practice game included and ideally two weeks is the ideal period with two practice games</li> <li>• 2 to 3 weeks if the player has already been assessed via video. If there is no such previous assessment, 6-10 weeks</li> <li>• A reasonable amount of time to see a player, if he is already used to the country, different time zone etc., should go from 1 week</li> <li>• 10 days to 30 days training. It is important to see how the player develops personally inside the new squad too</li> </ul>
USA	Long term - 5-6 weeks - continuous trials, inclusion in friendlies and regular practices
South East Asian Leagues (Vietnam/Malaysia/Singapore/Indonesia/Thailand & Hong Kong)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair period will be at least 2-4 weeks</li> <li>• Youth players need time to adapt to the new environment &amp; blend in with the club culture. For example, you cannot expect an English speaking Australian player to speak/understand foreign club culture</li> <li>• The first 1-2 weeks are for adaptation while the following 2-4 weeks should be used to assess/observe footballing skills</li> <li>• To be fair to the club stakeholders, they are taking a huge risk when they sign young players. It is not as if the success rate is incredibly high. It is a jackpot if the player turns out to be a gem. It is a real dampener if the player struggles to make an impact</li> </ul>
England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It totally depends from club to club. However in England, clubs generally agree on 6 week trials for players</li> <li>• If a player has been on trial at a club and training/playing matches consistently then 3 weeks should be fine</li> <li>• If the club is a lower level and the player outstanding (and wanted) wouldn't be surprised if a shorter-term offer is made on the day (if the club has done due diligence and the offer rubber-stamped)</li> <li>• Higher-level clubs, in my opinion, take a lot longer 3 practice trials and 2 matches or more. Some will even monitor the player for months thereafter and invite them back in for another trial later on</li> <li>• If the club want the player and others are interested they can move very quickly, but in general, if a player is relatively unknown or an overseas player it could take 2 x 1-week trials if not longer to make up their mind</li> </ul>

## Q4 - For what period of time, should a talented youth player trial before the club decides on whether to offer a professional first team contract? *(Table B)*

Belgium	Between at least 1 week to 10 days
Germany	A youth player from abroad should trial as early as possible. It would be perfect to spend two years in the youth team to acclimatise at the club
Smaller European Leagues (Cyprus/Greece/Israel/Lithuania/F inland/Sweden/Denmark/ Portugal/Netherlands)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depends on how much club scouts/coaches have seen the player before and how much information they have</li> <li>• Nobody can be sure of the time needed for a trial however I believe a player will need minimum a month to train play some friendlies and adapt but clubs are not giving this much time for players on trial these days</li> <li>• Normally it depends on quality of the player. If he is good and the staff wants to take him and clubs agreed about his transfer fee than they sign him immediately. But mostly young players come on a loan and I think it is a good option, then it is quite easy to make a decision</li> <li>• Portugal - 3 Phase trials 2 weeks at a time, preseason trials</li> <li>• Netherlands/Denmark - 2-4 week continuous trials, inclusion in friendlies and regular practices</li> </ul>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When a player is playing for youth teams, he is not allowed to make professional trials</li> <li>• For free players, trials are conducted usually in the month May</li> </ul>
Argentina	Depends if the player has other options. If he is losing other options, there is a limit on timeframe to make an offer

## Q5 - What are the main type of trial arrangements common in the country/football leagues you operate in? (Table A)

Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It can change from one club to another. There is a bit of everything. A few players for different positions, a whole group of players, it can depend on the club and the level at which they play and what requirements the club has</li> <li>• The only form of trialing is individually at any time during the season if it is possible to organise, provided that the player has already been scouted or observed. The trial therefore aims to confirm that the player can properly adapt to the team's level</li> <li>• No trials take place in order to "get to know" a player from scratch</li> <li>• It is highly unlikely that a trialist will be signed, because if he is good this will be clear from the observation stage, thus being able to skip the trial phase and going straight towards signing the player. Therefore, if a player is brought to trial, it is because there are doubts about him, and the trial process only helps confirm those doubts as the player struggles to show anything more than what he has already shown at his current club and competition</li> <li>• The best scenario for an Australian player to trial in Spain (2<sup>nd</sup> division clubs only, would need to have the characteristics such as being a Free Player at the moment of the trial, so club can sign him it is at no cost, International Player with Australia (U17-U19-U21 National Team), European Passport, player cover his expenses of traveling and staying in the city until contract is signed</li> </ul>
South East Asian Leagues (Vietnam/Malaysia/Singapore/Indonesia/Thailand)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previously, the FA of Singapore has conducted combine type trials for U21 foreign players</li> <li>• Generally, clubs will trial players individually or group of players for specific positions however in most of Asia we do not have talent camps or trial combine</li> </ul>
England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trial Matches, conduct trials for trialists for specific positions and trialing of players in pre-season is probably the most regular arrangements, and the group will be trimmed down over time</li> <li>• The risk is that staying with one club too long in this arrangement often reduces opportunities elsewhere and after 4 or 5 weeks the player may still be left uncontracted and other potential opportunities have gone</li> <li>• Trial matches still do happen but are less often than they used to be given the rise of U23 leagues in England at the expense of reserve teams (often meaning triallists are more difficult to accommodate)</li> <li>• Trial matches may be used for three reasons (i) trial players (1-3) who may plug squad gaps, (ii) trial academy players in open age environment,( iii) bring senior players back to match preparedness.</li> <li>• Rarely will a pro contract be offered after one trial match, unless the match is to assess fitness or confirm many scouting reports</li> <li>• Talent camps, group trial events, scouting events I would be very wary of as a player as they are often money-spinning events for 3<sup>rd</sup> parties or an off-shoot of a clubs community or academy program. A pro contract from one of these trial programs I think are incredibly unlikely</li> <li>• Open trials do happen, but infrequently for lower level clubs who are 'stretched' financially – hence this may change in the coming years as more lower level clubs struggle financially (but this wont lead to professional contracts straight away)</li> </ul>

## Q5 - What are the main type of trial arrangements common in the country/football leagues you operate in? (Table B)

Belgium	Training with the group during preseason and play some games with the group of the first team or the U21
USA	5-6 week continuous trial, inclusion in friendlies, and regular practices. Trial combines also exist in the USL mainly
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This depends on the circumstances, but normally the players do trial during the normal training maybe in a break of the league for instance during international matches. Talent camps are often for younger local players from the local area</li> <li>• Players generally can be scouted in a competition like international tournaments as in Germany we have bigger indoor and outdoor tournaments where sometimes teams from Brazil, Croatia (and other nations) were invited. This is a perfect stage for players to present their skills to many scouts at the same time and put player on a watchlist and follow his development for a time before they ask him to do a trial</li> </ul>
Smaller European Leagues (Cyprus/Greece/Israel/Lithuania/Finland/Sweden/Russia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Finland and Scandinavia professional clubs; its player by player case. No group trials</li> <li>• Some markets lack patience when it comes to young players and clubs also expect results as soon as possible. This has to do with football mentality however this can be very stressful for a young player</li> <li>• The whole atmosphere around the football in smaller leagues in Europe makes it easier for a young player to have more of a chance and more time in a more advanced European league because of the impatience in smaller leagues</li> <li>• Trials here are offered to young players, if they are offered that is during pre -season with daily training and friendly games. It is more common for smaller clubs to offer trials than the bigger clubs</li> <li>• In Lithuania, there is only few clubs who can pay good salaries and trial players at that level</li> <li>• Clubs tests the players before the season being January-February</li> <li>• Unfortunately, not all leagues can have players from abroad because we just can't afford them</li> <li>• In the Russian market, agents have a lot of power therefore are searching for potential candidates in well-known academies and sign them with them representation contracts to help them in their careers to trial</li> </ul>
France	Trialing a group of players in the preseason and trialing just few trialists for specific playing positions
Argentina	In Argentina, usually there is a period for trials, but all for youth divisions. Is not common to organise trials for the 1st team. So, the answer is that there is a period for trials, where players go for 5 days to a club. However, if there is a talented player, can ask for a trial at any time



## PART B

A worldwide on-line survey questionnaire with responses from a further 40 football player agents located in 40 different countries



# Success at a trial

## Question:

What are the significant factors/reasons you have come across which results in a talented younger player being offered a professional contract after a trial?

<i>Answer (Player Agent could choose more than 1 answer)</i>	<i>% out of 40 respondents</i>
Stood out at the trial and had an excellent performance at trial matches	65%
Right player for position	30%
Better player than what the club has currently for the position	57%
Good player that is free and affordable and is within the club's budget	40%
Player was directly invited to trial by club who were already very interested to sign him	32%
Club sees the player as one who has potential to be a candidate for a future transfer/sell-on	55%
The club knows the Player Agent therefore will give the player an opportunity to prove himself	45%
Club has policy to give professional opportunity to 2-3 or more of their academy players	15%
Player understands and fits into the culture of the club	22.5%
Player knows how to do all the decisive training drills which gives him a huge advantage	10%
Other reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hunger for international success</li> <li>• Player is eager to learn and wants to get the most out of himself</li> <li>• Adaptability and attitude</li> </ul>	10%

# No success at the trial

## Question:

What are the significant factors/reasons you have come across which results in a talented younger player not being offered a professional contract after a trial?

<i>Answer (Player Agent could choose more than 1 answer)</i>	<i>% out of 40 respondents</i>
Player is surrounded by people (other players) who rather see the trialist fail	15%
Failing to prepare	30%
Passport and work permit issues	25%
Not enough talent, technique and tactical awareness	60%
Coach or Football director or Board of club do not like player	35%
Athleticism and physicality is lacking	25%
Player is not 10%- 20% better than the players the club already has	67.5%
Lack of first team game time at player's former clubs therefore a risk for new club to sign him	20%
Lack of speed of thought and decision making	20%
The player has only 2-3 training sessions to show his worth and to make an impression which makes it difficult to get a contract	47%
Player does not perform to their best in a strange environment and in a new culture	27.5%
Other reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to whims and fancies of the club owner</li> <li>• Lack of adaptability and attitude</li> <li>• No previous professional playing experience</li> </ul>	10%

## No contract offer impact on Player and Player Agent

### Question:

What impact does an unsuccessful professional football contract trial, have on the player and their player agent/football intermediary?

<i>Answer (Player Agent could choose more than 1 answer)</i>	<i>% out of 40 respondents</i>
Player's agent loses money	27.5%
Player's agent loses credibility and their reputation with the club	55%
The Player's agent did not do enough due diligence on the abilities of the player before organising the trial	20%
Player loses an opportunity	35%
Player loses his confidence	55%
Player may have tarnished his reputation	22.5%
The Player agent and Player may fall out due to the player not considering the trial as suitable	30%
The Player agent would be weary to recommend the player for future trials	37.5%
Other reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We often come across desperate "agents" who doesn't really know the player and doesn't even care about the player. Very often the person promoting the player doesn't know anything about his "customer's (club's) needs" or the actual level of competition in that particular club. And at the same time he doesn't know much about the "product (player)" they are promoting</li> </ul>	2.5%

# Feedback for trialist

## Question:

Are clubs giving proper feedback/instructions to a player who is unsuccessful at his trial on how he may improve?

<i>Answer (Player Agent could choose more than 1 answer)</i>	<i>% out of 40 respondents</i>
Yes - Full and frank feedback is provided on the trialist's performance	22.5%
Yes - However the feedback from the Club is vague and unconvincing	47.5%
No - In football trials there there is nobody to tell you what you did wrong and what you did right. It's either in or out	35%
No - The Club just tells the player that you are no longer required to attend	32.5%
Club gives the popular generic answer 'in that they have no budget for the player or that it is too hard to get a work permit for the player'	35%
The Club generally advises that they will monitor the trialist and that they may be invited again in the future for a trial	47.5%
The Club sets out specific benchmarks at the start of the trial that must be met for a player to be successful at the trial	7.5%
Other reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Football Federation Australia should appoint a professional guide in each significant football country to assist the really talented Australian players when trialing</li> </ul>	2.5%



# How long should a club trial be?

## Question:

For what period of time, should a talented player trial before the club decides on whether to offer them a professional first team contract?

<i>Answer (Player Agent could only choose 1 answer)</i>	<i>% out of 40 respondents</i>
Less than 1 week	5.13%
1 to 2 weeks	43.59%
2 to 4 weeks	33.33%
4 to 6 weeks	0%
More than 6 weeks	0%
Sometimes the player must trial 2 or more times before a decision is made by the club	15.38%
Other reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It depends on the player's quality. If a coach can see it's a top quality potential player, the player shouldn't trial for more than 3 - 4 days</li> <li>• There's no stipulated maximum period. It can be from 1 day to 1 month. It's a question of fairness of time. However, a club might decide to keep a player longer than 1 month, as long as the player is not registered to play official matches for the club</li> <li>• When player agents bring players from other markets (<i>Africa, South America, Asia</i>) to trial at a club it is important to give the player time to adapt for new style of football, circumstances, people at the club before the player can show his best. However, generally clubs don't give this time and trialing decisions are made very quickly in the football business</li> </ul>	2.57%

# Trial offerings

## Question:

What are the main type of trial arrangements common in your country/leagues?

<i>Answer (Player Agent could choose more than 1 answer)</i>	<i>% out of 40 respondents</i>
Trialing a group of players in the preseason	60%
Use of trial matches	57.5%
Trialing just few trialists for specific playing positions	35%
Trial combines or talent camps	12.5%
Short trial and then fitness test	12.5%
Rarely are trials conducted	15%
Clubs pays for (fly and accommodate player) trial by official invitation only	22.5%
Clubs will only give a talented young player a trial if he pays the full costs of trial	32.5%
Other reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing competitive games during a trial</li> <li>• In some countries, young talents are rarely given a chance because the league prefers older players with experience probably due to the nature of the league</li> <li>• The bigger clubs rarely conduct trials: Clubs such as <i>FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Liverpool, Manchester United</i> etc, rarely would consider a young player in Australia that has developed there for the last 4 years. The jump is just too high in quality</li> </ul>	2.5%

# Scheduling of trials

## Question:

When are trials conducted by football clubs normally in your country/local league?

<i>Answer (Player Agent could only choose 1 answer)</i>	<i>% out of 40 respondents</i>
Summer transfer window (pre-season)	52.5%
Winter transfer window (mid-season)	17.5%
At all times of the year	10%
Clubs do not trial, just sign scouted players subject to fitness and medical tests	10%
When the club goes on tours to play friendlies	5%
Only when a new coach is appointed by the club	0%
Other reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different seasonal transfer window in some countries - where the winter window (preseason) is the most important but clubs also sign players in summer, half way through the season</li> <li>• As and when needed. Sometimes during the national teams/FIFA competition break</li> <li>• It depends on the professional league (<i>1st division clubs do not trial players. 2nd division clubs usually at preseason. 3rd division all year as they have lower budget</i>)</li> </ul>	5%

# Player trialing trends

## Question:

Which of the following player club trialing propositions do you as a player agent/football intermediary agree with?

<i>Answer (Player Agent could choose more than 1 answer)</i>	<i>% out of 40 respondents</i>
Between 80% to 95% of the younger football player who attend professional trials have their trial end in rejection	60%
There is no learning experience in this whole concept of 'trialing' for a player	25%
Players are never given enough time to perform at a maximum level at a trial to show all of their talent and skills	42.5%
First impression means a lot in the football trialing business	70%
If a player is not in the best physical shape of their life then they should not trial	57.5%
In my country - clubs are moving away from player trials and instead moving to recruiting players through scouting and use of scouting platforms (i.e. Wyscout, Instat and Transfermarkt)	27.5%
Clubs can loan talented players from bigger clubs therefore this impacts the number of new players they are willing to trial	25%
Clubs will recommend a good trialist who just missed out on a professional contract to another club	15%
Clubs promote talented younger players to train with senior team squad which may be considered a form of player trialing	42.5%
Young talented players who come from another country to trial at a local club are scrutinised at a higher level than local players	50%



# BEST PRACTICE CLUB TRIAL GUIDANCE FROM INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL AGENTS TO YOUNG AUSTRALIAN PLAYERS (I)

## Preparation is key

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Apart from talent, you should learn prior to trial the football/game style of that country, and have own intention to come to that country, i.e. strongly wishing to play in that league

Ask for as much and detailed feedback as possible. Request a plan of action if an unsuccessful outcome. Ask for a benchmark comparison

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Search for clubs that usually recruit trialists  
-  
Trial only for international clubs that invest in the academy and scouting

Have confidence of who you are and speak up. Through training and through matches lead the team, ask for the ball. Express your hunger

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Know the country you are going to and possible limitations such as salary and Non-EU regulations. Confirm the trial is "real and fair"

Do not be too overconfident as this may play a major role in not getting a deal. Be sure you want to leave Australia because of the kind of football life that you want to live

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As a player have good characteristics and commitment. Be professional at all times

# BEST PRACTICE CLUB TRIAL GUIDANCE FROM INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL AGENTS TO YOUNG AUSTRALIAN PLAYERS (III)

Take maximum out of yourself -  
Better to just go without fear and smash it on the pitch

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A key question is: Did the club invite you based on whether they saw you playing or were you offered by an agent? Many trials fail because you were sent to a trial not right for you

Be prepared both mentally and physically and also do not make excuses

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Show your confidence and don't be scared of making mistakes

Do not come with the wrong attitude to a trial and do not expect that in 6-12 months you will move on to bigger league. Focus on making it first at the lower level

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Always be 110% prepared physically, mentally and technically, before going for any trial!

It is crucial that you as a player shows that you have done due diligence with regards to the football market you are trialing at prior to coming

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Come to trials fit and willing to succeed. Don't show too much respect to your opponent and do not pull out of tackles



# BEST PRACTICE CLUB TRIAL GUIDANCE FROM INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL AGENTS TO YOUNG AUSTRALIAN PLAYERS (III)

Homework on where your trialing must be done properly. Blind attempts are unlikely to be successful and can damage your future

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Make a very good impression at the 1st training - Coaches make decisions via first impression in 1st training and in coming days their mind collects information supporting that 1st impression

Prepare all documents for a trip/trial to Europe. Also have adequate funds to pay for the travel/accommodation

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Talent alone is not enough - tactical awareness and mental strength are also key

Be yourself, keep it simple, make sure you do the basics and thoroughly enjoy yourself on the pitch

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Look at the foreign players currently at the club and what the local to foreign ratio is. Consider which player out of the foreign ones you think your better than and how you can replace that player

Look at the wage of the foreign players and the living standards. Also, look at what positions foreigners play

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Talent and your football instinct are significant factors to get into a professional leagues

# BEST PRACTICE CLUB TRIAL GUIDANCE FROM INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL AGENTS TO YOUNG AUSTRALIAN PLAYERS (IV)

You must know all the technical drill basics and be able to finish all training drills

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Understanding the club culture, playing philosophy and even the background of key staff stakeholders

Accept that each trial exposure can provide meaningful and useable experience to better position you for the next opportunity

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Do not be overwhelmed and do not see it as a once in a lifetime opportunity

Don't blame yourself for failure to earn a contract as there are multiple mitigating factors - take responsibility to ensure your preparation and engagement is as good as it possibly can be

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Open your mind to learn how to effect potential better outcomes at the next opportunity as the reality is you must persevere

The professional playing lid doesn't get closed shut for good but there are only going to be so many windows of opportunity

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Accept a trial only if the club will spend time to find your real skills/level and not to find out if you are just "good"

# THE INFLUENCE OF THE PLAYER AGENT ON PLAYER TRIALS

The study revealed that player agents may influence outcomes of player trials in several respects:

## Positive influence

- Player agents are one of the main protagonists in the football business to secure trials and navigate moves for young players
- Good player agents, trust a coach or well credentialed scout and take their advice on the player
- The trial outcome may be affected by the relationship between the agent and player and whether both are loyal, positive and mutually accountable
- It's important to note that many highly talented young players are unable to cement their position in their local leagues top clubs, therefore through the player agents they end up finding the places to develop in some other European clubs who are in the business of developing and transferring players
- Players agents may use the promotion strategy that a player was trialing with various good clubs and use that as a reference tool to get a further trial for the player
- In Spain, a trial is arranged usually due to the good relationship and connections that the agent has with the club

## Negative influence

- A player agent may price the player out of a club contract after the trial when an offer is made
- If a player agent has a raft of trials set up one after the other, then the player should ask if these are realistic opportunities (i.e. is the club really that interested, or are these more prospecting trials)
- Until recently European clubs would always cover travels hotel and board while players trialed. Nowadays, younger players and possibly the player agent must pay the cost of a trial. The player agent may request monies for the trial in some countries

*“Player agents are only one of four significant options to obtain trials at good clubs. The other are a referral from a technical director/coach to another club, being a youth international or being scouted by a club and invited directly”*

# THE CHANGING FOOTBALL RECRUITMENT LANDSCAPE FACING YOUNG AUSTRALIAN PLAYERS SEEKING AN INTERNATIONAL TRIAL

- *Trials are less common:* Trials are becoming less common as clubs have huge scouting networks, their own youth academies and use technological platforms like Wyscout or Instat (noting player on trial is much more affordable than a player scouted in Wyscout). For instance, in Spain only a few Second division clubs (weaker/regional) and some Third Division clubs would entertain trials. Further, Clubs normally try to avoid trials as they represent an expenditure which most often doesn't yield positive outcomes unless it lower league English teams who are looking for ex Premier League club academy players
- *There is significant competition from players from many nations who want an opportunity to trial:* Australian players must understand that countries like France with academies and football schools with players from France or many African countries then they are already a second or third option. Similarly, the same applies in the Netherlands with preference for Surinam and Curacao players etc
- *Australian football player development has declined therefore demand for Australian players to trial is just not there:* Australia seems to no longer be producing the all rounded talented youth players that are so hard working and football minded. Further, European clubs are not monitoring many Australian players
- *Australian players have to fully convince clubs to receive a trial:* Australia is not close to Europe, and Australian leagues are not the most attractive championship therefore clubs are not patient to give trialing opportunities
- *The success rate at a trial or making it as a professional player is very low:* Only a very small % of players make it, whilst injuries, family life and physicality play a part. The hunger to succeed as a professional footballer has declined in Australia
- *Players have a ceiling:* A player can be nurtured and developed, obtain ultimate fitness in 4-5 weeks, get taught tactics, get the 100% fit but each player has a "ceiling". And it seems that the "ceiling" in Australia for most players is in the lower range. This may have to do with the mentality, abilities and the development system in the lower age groups in Australia

# CONCLUSION

For young players there is always the excitement of being invited to an international football club trial as it is the platform to **showcase their 'game' to the decision makers.**

However, as this study has revealed **through the lens of a plethora of international player agents** “the player trialing landscape is challenging and it has become extremely difficult for young talented Australian players who may have a talent ceiling to achieve success at a trial due to various club considerations and selection factors”.



In effect as this research study suggests, club trials can be unforgiving for younger Australian male players as slight variations in speed, athleticism, tactical nous, luck, opinion, attitude, talent, perception of nationality, being at the right club in the right position and technical ability all impact on the trialist securing the sought after **professional playing deal!**

*Peter Paleologos thanks and acknowledges all the contributors from 50 countries to this seminal Australian report on young footballer player trialing. All the names of the player agents and intermediaries who contributed to this report have been kept private and confidential.*



# THANK YOU!



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