

CIES Football Observatory
Summer Series 2024

MATCH CALENDAR AND PLAYER WORKLOAD

2

**MATCH SCHEDULE PER CLUB
A GLOBAL ANALYSIS**



INTRODUCTION

The second report of the CIES Football Observatory Summer Series on Match Calendar and Player Workload analyses the trends in the number of official games played by clubs in 40 leagues from five confederations (list annexed) between the twelve-season period from 2012/13 (since July 1st) to 2023/24 (until June 30th), with a specific analysis for the most competitive big-5 league clubs since 2000.

As in the first report, we focus on the breakdown of matches played by clubs (not including friendlies apart for a specific analysis of FIFA Club World Cup winners) according to the organiser (leagues, associations, confederations and FIFA), and then project data for the period 2024-2028, taking into account the planned changes to the format of certain competitions at both domestic and international level.

In total, the sample includes 1,103 clubs that participated in at least one season of the championships analysed. The average number of teams per season over the entire period analysed is about 663, with an increase after the pandemic, which reflects the enlargement of some of the domestic leagues surveyed (notably the MLS in the United States and Canada as well as the top Argentinean division).

Figure 1: number of clubs surveyed per season, 40 leagues

2012/13	647	<div style="width: 647px;"></div>
2013/14	650	<div style="width: 650px;"></div>
2014/15	661	<div style="width: 661px;"></div>
2015/16	655	<div style="width: 655px;"></div>
2016/17	656	<div style="width: 656px;"></div>
2017/18	648	<div style="width: 648px;"></div>
2018/19	652	<div style="width: 652px;"></div>
2019/20	652	<div style="width: 652px;"></div>
2020/21	702	<div style="width: 702px;"></div>
2021/22	679	<div style="width: 679px;"></div>
2022/23	680	<div style="width: 680px;"></div>
2023/24	677	<div style="width: 677px;"></div>

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Trends 2012-2024

On a seasonal average over the twelve years analysed, the clubs surveyed played 41.5 official matches (not including friendlies). The record low (32.7 games) was recorded in 2019/20, when many competitions had to be cancelled or postponed due to the health crisis, while a maximum of 43.9 matches was observed the following season. Apart from these cyclical variations, no lasting changes were recorded during the period under review.

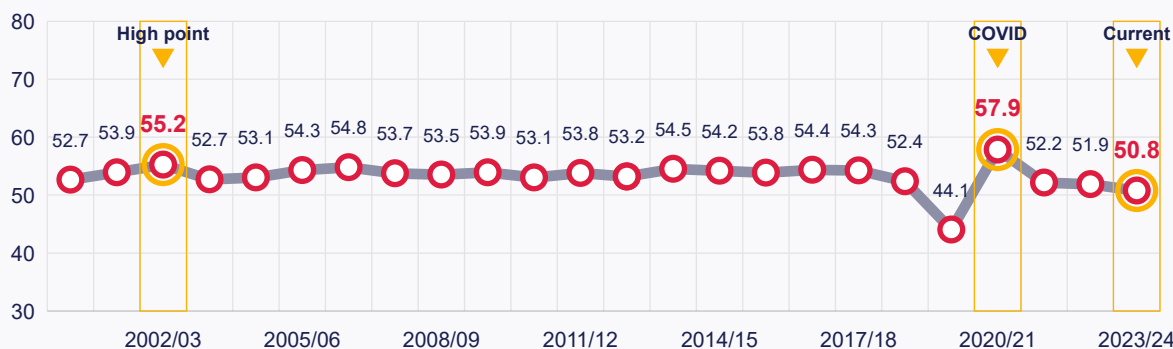
Figure 2: average number of matches, per club and season



UEFA Champions League participants 2000-2024

The analysis of the average number of official matches per season for the five major European leagues' representatives in the Champions League since the 2000/01 season shows that the number of fixtures is relatively stable, or even slightly down, which runs counter to the popular belief that the match calendar is becoming more and more crowded for the top clubs.

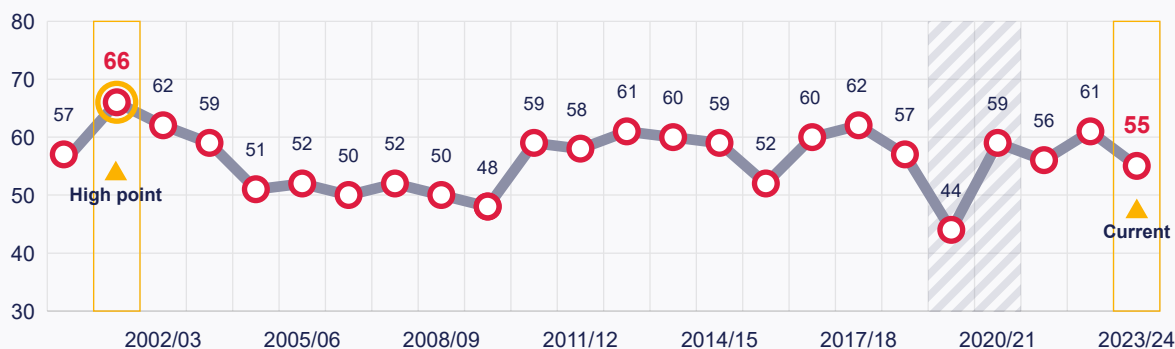
Figure 3: average number of matches



The specific analysis on the number of official matches for three of the most successful and popular clubs worldwide, Real Madrid, Manchester United and Bayern Munich shows that in all three cases the record number of matches in a season dates from the decade between 2000 and 2010: 66 matches in 2001/02 for Real Madrid, 66 matches in 2008/09 for Manchester United and 57 matches in 2007/08 for Bayern Munich.

Figure 4: Number of official matches per season

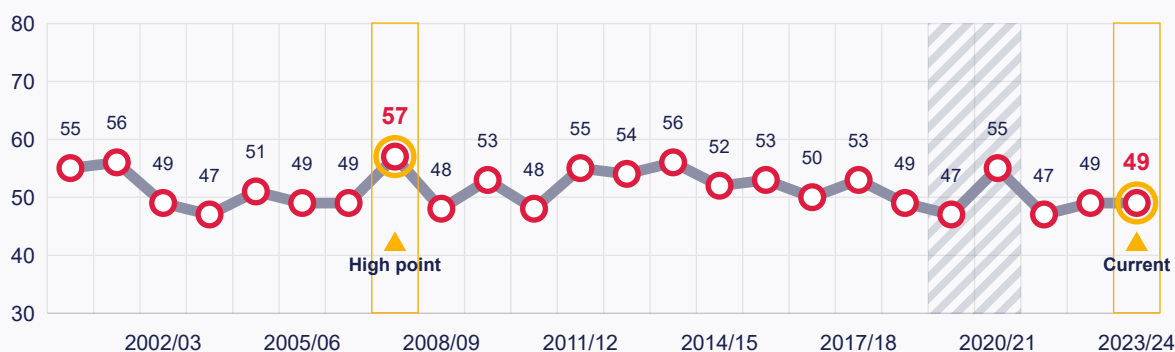
(a) Real Madrid



(b) Manchester United



(c) Bayern Munich



Almost half of the clubs analysed played fewer than 40 official fixtures per season over the twelve years under review (45.1%). This proportion exceeds 80% for teams that contested a maximum of 50 matches. In contrast, only 5.0% of the clubs studied (33 per season on average) played at least 60 official games per season. As with the players (see first report), the proportion of clubs with a high level of activity is relatively low.

Figure 5: % of clubs, per number of matches per season

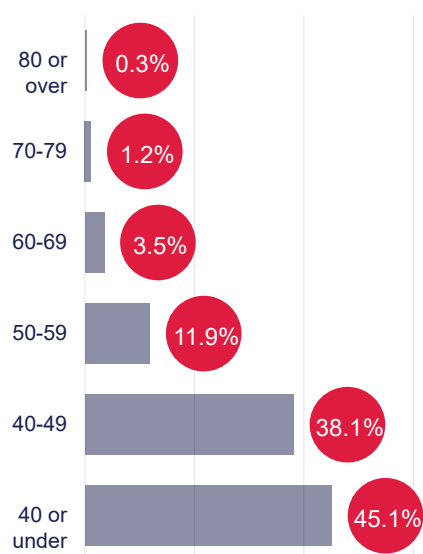


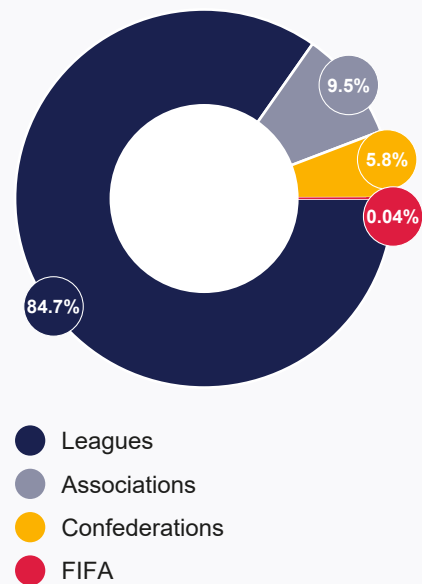
Figure 6: % of clubs with >60 matches per season

2012/13	5.1%	■
2013/14	5.1%	■
2014/15	6.5%	■
2015/16	5.3%	■
2016/17	5.5%	■
2017/18	4.9%	■
2018/19	4.1%	■
2019/20	0.2%	■
2020/21	9.4%	■
2021/22	5.4%	■
2022/23	3.7%	■
2023/24	4.0%	■

No significant change was observed in the proportion of clubs having played 60 or more matches per season over the twelve seasons analysed. A record percentage (9.4%) was registered in the 2020/21 post-COVID season as a result of the catch-up effect on matches postponed in 2019/20. The values measured for the last two seasons (3.7% for 2022/23 and 4.0% for 2023/24) are even lower than the average recorded over the entire period (5.0%).

Of the 330,748 official matches played by the teams in our sample between July 2012 and June 2024, 84.7% were organised by national leagues. The proportions for the other categories of organiser are much lower: 9.5% for associations, 5.8% for confederations and 0.04% for FIFA. These figures clearly show the dominant role played by national leagues in the organisation of men's club football worldwide.

Figure 8: percentage of matches, per organiser



The analysis of the evolution of the share of matches per organiser over the twelve seasons analysed shows a relatively stable balance between each of them. The main change is the decline in the relative weight of associations (-1.8% of matches between 2012/13 and 2023/24) to the benefit of confederations (+0.7%) and leagues (+1.1%). The percentage of fixtures organised by FIFA at club level never exceeded 0.07%.

Figure 9: percentage of matches in competitions, per organiser and season

Season	Leagues	Associations	Confederations	FIFA
2012/13	84.0%	10.2%	5.7%	0.04%
2013/14	84.4%	9.8%	5.7%	0.02%
2014/15	84.0%	10.6%	5.4%	0.03%
2015/16	84.0%	10.2%	5.7%	0.04%
2016/17	84.2%	10.0%	5.7%	0.05%
2017/18	85.0%	9.4%	5.5%	0.05%
2018/19	84.3%	9.8%	5.8%	0.05%
2019/20	84.4%	9.6%	5.9%	0.07%
2020/21	86.6%	7.9%	5.4%	0.04%
2021/22	84.8%	8.9%	6.2%	0.04%
2022/23	85.7%	8.7%	5.5%	0.03%
2023/24	85.1%	8.4%	6.4%	0.03%

The national leagues are the main organisers of matches also for the most active teams at international level. An analysis of the distribution of fixtures played by FIFA Club World Cup winners in the season in which they lifted the trophy shows that almost two-thirds of their matches were organised by a league. This proportion is almost 60% also by including friendly matches organised by the clubs themselves or private organisers. Friendlies accounted for no less than 8.5% of all matches, almost as much as for associations (9.4%) and much more than for FIFA (3.1%).

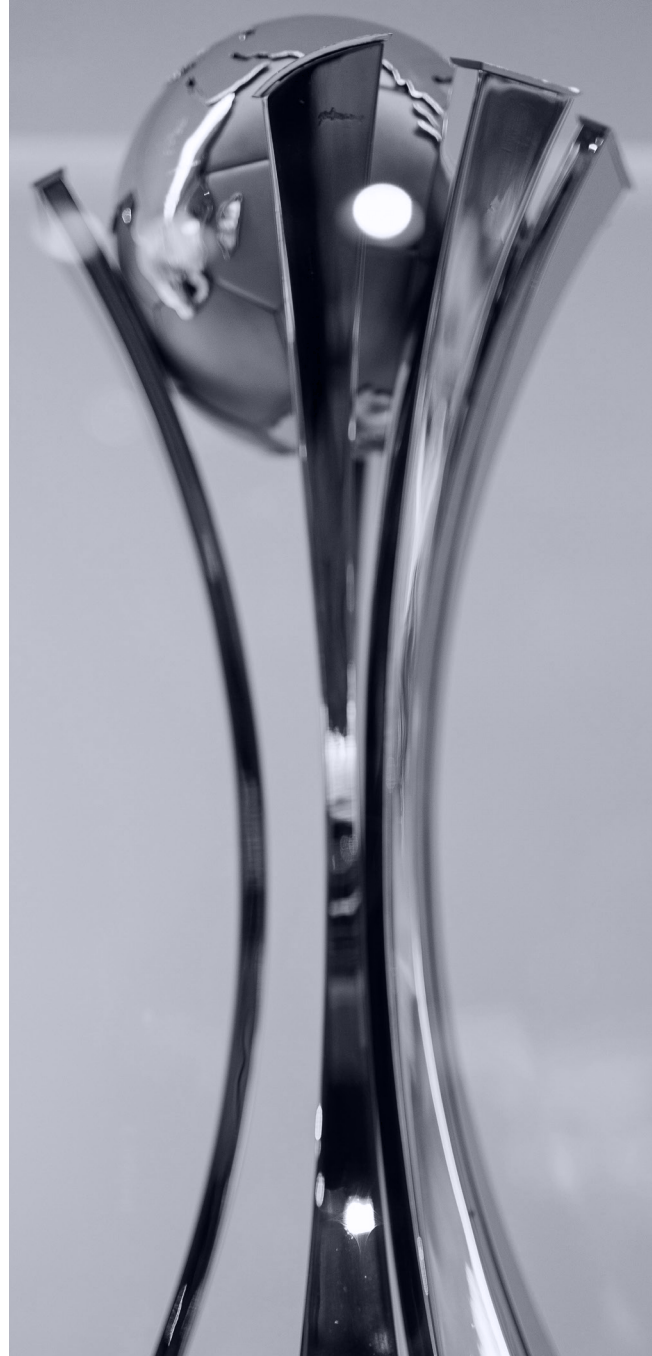
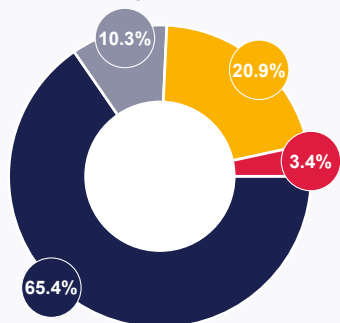
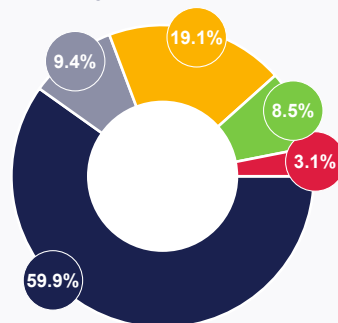


Figure 10: % of matches per organiser, last 12-year FIFA Club World Cup winners

(a) Not including friendlies



(b) Including friendlies



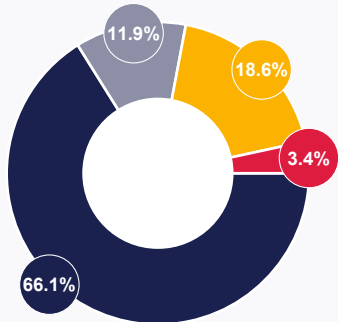
- Leagues
- Associations
- Confederations
- Friendlies
- FIFA



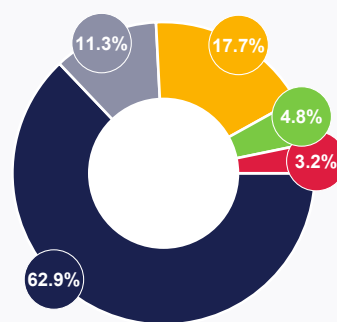
The same analysis was carried out for the most recent FIFA Club World Cup winner, Manchester City. In the season just ended, the English side played 66.1% of their official matches in competitions organised by the league. This percentage is 62.9% if friendly matches are also factored in, with the latter accounting for 4.8% of the total number of games played by Manchester City between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024.

Figure 11: percentage of matches per organiser, Manchester City (2023-2024)

(a) Not including friendlies



(b) Including friendlies

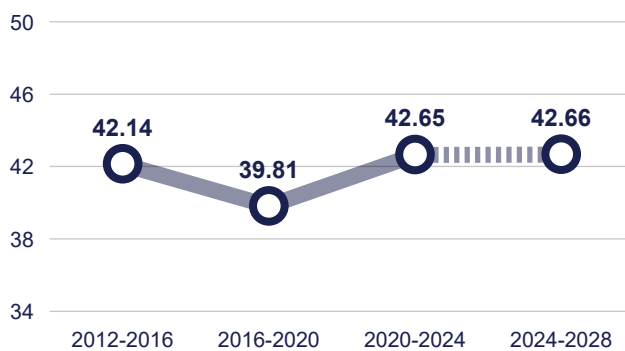


- Leagues
- Associations
- Confederations
- Friendlies
- FIFA

PROJECTIONS 2024-2028

With regard to the projection for the next four years, considering the most recent data and the changes made or planned in the format of certain competitions, without any new major modifications, the average number of official matches played per club per season will remain stable compared to the figures recorded during the 2020-2024 cycle

Figure 12: average number of matches per club and season, per four-year cycle



With no further decline in the balance of the competitions, the proportion of teams playing more than 70 or 80 matches per season will also remain stable over the next four years. The main change will be for clubs playing between 60 and 69 games (+0.8%) and between 50 and 59 fixtures (+0.4%), to the detriment of those playing between 40 and 49 matches (-1.3%).

Figure 13: percentage of clubs per number of matches per season, per four-year cycle

	less than 40	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80 or more
2012-2016	43.3%	40.0%	11.3%	3.9%	1.5%	0.1%
2016-2020	51.8%	34.9%	9.7%	2.8%	0.7%	0.2%
2020-2024	40.2%	39.5%	14.6%	3.9%	1.2%	0.6%
2024-2028	40.1%	38.2%	15.0%	4.7%	1.3%	0.6%

Figure 13 shows the projected changes in the percentage of matches by type of organiser for the period 2024-2028 compared with the previous three four-year cycles. The national leagues will continue to play a dominant role in the organisation of men’s world football, with an increase in the relative weight of the confederations (+1.05% to 6.95%), and FIFA, whose weight will nevertheless remain below 0.1% (0.08%).

Figure 14: percentage of matches by competition organisers, per four-year cycle



CONCLUSION

No significant change in the number of official matches played by clubs in the 40 leagues analysed was recorded between 2012 and 2024. The same finding holds also true for the big-5 leagues' representatives in the UEFA Champions League since the 2000/01 season, with even a slight decrease in this case. Not including friendlies, the average number of fixtures per club and season is stable at just over 40 overall, and at just over 50 for the most competitive European teams.

Globally, only around 5% of clubs play 60 or more games per season, with record values measured in Brazil and Colombia. Apart from 2020/21, when many of the matches postponed in the previous season due to the pandemic were finally played, the record for the number of games by a club outside Brazil and Colombia has been held by Chelsea since 2012/13: 69 official fixtures.

According to our projections, the main change for the next four-year cycle will be the relative increase in the number of teams playing between 50 and 69 official matches per season (+1.6% to 19.7% of total clubs). However, no major changes are expected for clubs playing at least 70 official games per season, their share remaining stable at less than 2% of the total number of teams.



Annex: leagues surveyed

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

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

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

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

More information: www.football-observatory.com