

2008/2009 PFA A-LEAGUE INJURY REPORT

(3rd edition)

July 2009

“The Culture of Football”

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INTRODUCTION

The health and wellbeing of professional footballers are vital concerns of the Australian Professional Footballers' Association (**PFA**), the exclusive collective bargaining agent and representative body of Australia's elite footballers, including A-League players. The PFA's concern is amplified by two phenomena: (1) that the career of a professional footballer is, by its nature, precarious, short term and in constant transition; and (2) the impact of injury on the presentation and quality of the game.

Over four seasons, the A-League has established itself as one of the major players in the Australian sports and entertainment industry. Separate PFA surveying reveals that players increasingly recognise that the A-League is now a career destination, rather than merely a stepping stone to careers of varying qualities throughout the world.

For the continued growth and success of the competition, protecting the health and safety of A-League players is essential. A-League clubs have a responsibility to ensure the safety of players by providing a working environment which is free from any unreasonable risk to their health and wellbeing. Effective injury prevention and management practices are essential for clubs to successfully fulfill this responsibility.

This annual report of the PFA, now in its third edition, collates and analyses available data to measure the impact and extent of injury within the A-League. It does so by reference to important consideration such as games missed, injury type and the number of players injured during the course of the season. This edition shows the continuing relationship between injury rates and on-field success, providing a positive incentive for clubs to invest in their medical teams.

However, some troubling trends are emerging, and warrant ongoing monitoring, review and intervention: the total number of games missed through injury increased last season; injury rates again worsened as the season approached its end; and the incidence of soft tissue injuries remained significant. Sadly, injury management in the A-League is behind other major sports.

The transition for injured players coming off contract is extremely difficult. At least 8 players remained injured when coming off contract at the end of the season, jeopardising their prospects of achieving a contract renewal or a new contract at another club.

Effective player injury prevention and management practices in the A-League are certain to come under ever increasing focus. If clubs, as employers, do not listen to the demands of the sports medicine community and the players, the on-field consequences will ensure they will ultimately be held to account by their fans.



Brendan Schwab
PFA Chief Executive & General Counsel

AIM

To measure the number of games missed by A-League players through injury and the types of injuries suffered.

METHODOLOGY

Publicly available sources were used to collate information, including:

- FFA's weekly A-League Match previews and reviews; and
- official A-League Club websites.

An injury is defined as any injury or other medical condition that prevents a player from participating in a match.

SEASON DURATION AND NUMBER OF PLAYERS

The 2008/09 A-League regular season comprised 21 rounds, with up to an additional 4 rounds played for the final series. The regular season ran for approximately 5 months, commencing in mid-August and concluding in February.

The maximum squad size per club remained at 23 players for the 2008/09 season.

A-League clubs were permitted to sign Replacement Players on short term contracts during the season to cover for listed squad players with injuries lasting longer than 6 weeks or absent on national team duty.

IMPORTANT NOTE ON RESULTS

The accuracy of the following results is dependent upon the precision of the sources of information from FFA's media releases and club reports. Accordingly, the following results should not be taken as providing an exact and complete record of player injuries. They are, however, an accurate summation as FFA's media releases and club reports are based on official information provided by FFA and club sources.

Note that there was incomplete or unavailable data for approximately 7 rounds of the 2005/06 season. Accordingly, where appropriate, 2005/06 results have been increased pro rata from 14 rounds to 21 rounds. Finals matches were not taken into account.

GAMES MISSED THROUGH INJURY

Table 1 details and compares the number of games missed per club for the 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 A-League home and away seasons and each club's relative table position at the end of the season.

The total number of games missed through injury for all A-League clubs increased by 3% in 2008/09 to 506 (avg. 63) from 482 (avg. 60) in 2007/08. In 2008/09, Adelaide United, Melbourne Victory and Sydney FC were the 3 clubs in the A-League that registered a decrease in the total number of games missed through injury. However, Sydney FC again registered a total number of games missed through injury which is

significantly high in comparison with other A-League clubs. Newcastle Jets and Perth Glory were the clubs that recorded the highest increase in total number of games missed through injury in 2008/09 season.

Central Coast Mariners had the highest average number of games missed due to injury, at 83.8 games, over the last 4 A-League seasons. Adelaide United was not far behind with an average of 71.5 games missed. On the other hand, Wellington Phoenix and Melbourne Victory were the clubs with the lowest average games missed by players due to injury with an average of 26.5 and 28.8 games missed respectively.

Table 1 shows that Sydney FC and Melbourne Victory had the best record in their championship seasons while Newcastle had the second best record when winning the title.

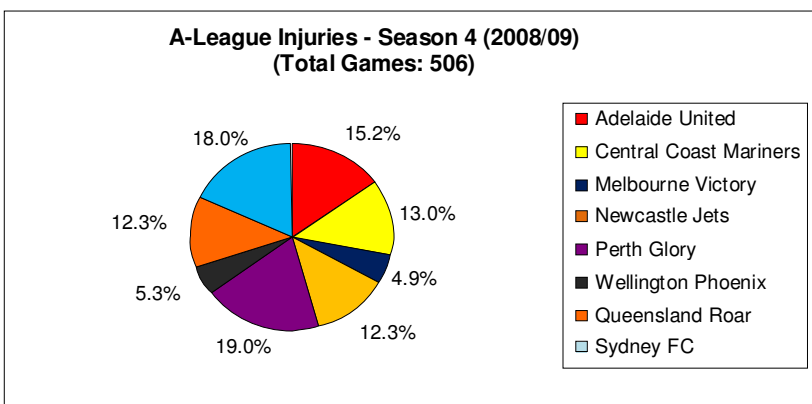
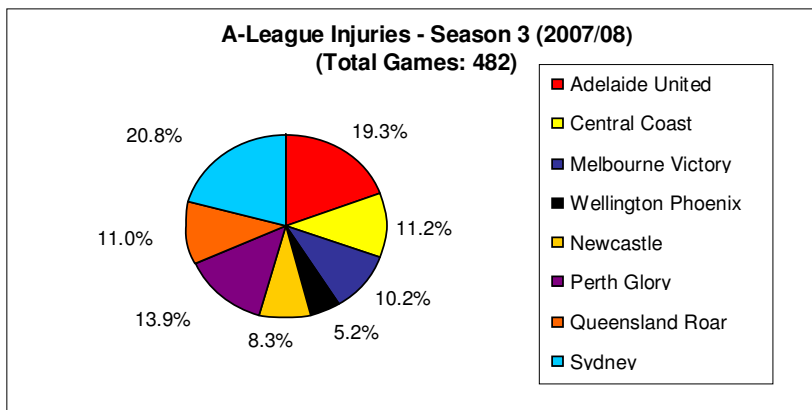
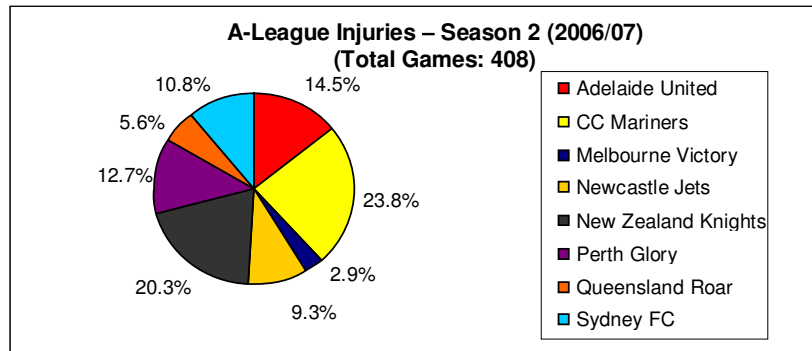
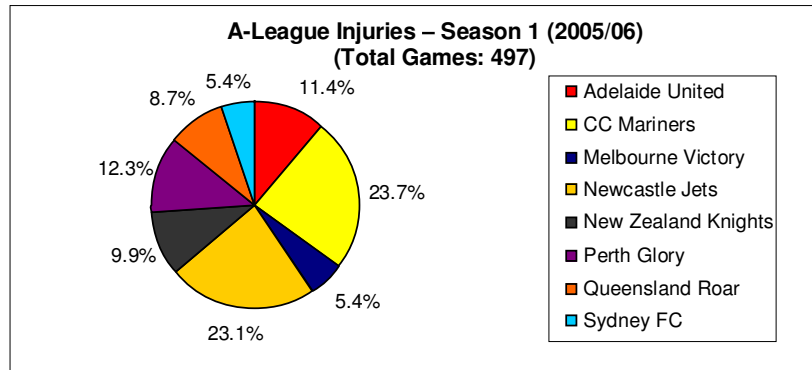
Table 1: Injury Rank and Table Position, A-League Clubs, Seasons 1 - 4

CLUB	2005/2006 Home and Away Season*			2006/2007 Home and Away Season			2007/2008 Home and Away Season			2008/2009 Home and Away Season			Club Avg.
	#	Injury Rank	Table Position	#	Injury Rank	Table Position	#	Injury Rank	Table Position	#	Injury Rank	Table Position	
Adelaide United	57	5	1	59	6	2	93	7	6	77	6	2	71.5
CC Mariners	118	8	3	97	8	6	54	5	1	66	5	4	83.8
Melbourne Victory	27	1	7	12	1	1	51	3	5	25	1	1	28.8
Newcastle Jets	115	7	4	38	3	3	40	2	2	62	3	8	63.8
NZ Knights	49	4	8	83	7	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	66.0
Perth Glory	61	6	5	52	5	7	67	6	7	96	8	7	69.0
Queensland Roar	43	3	6	23	2	5	53	4	4	62	3	3	45.3
Sydney FC	27	1	2	44	4	4	98	8	3	91	7	5	65.0
Wellington Phoenix	-	-	-	-	-	-	26	1	8	27	2	6	26.5
TOTAL	497			408			482			506			473.3
A-League Average	62			51			60.2			63			59.08

* Information available for approximately 14 rounds has been scaled upwards, pro rata, to 21 rounds to enable comparison.

The total number of games missed through injury during the regular season for all A-League clubs was 497 in Season 1, 408 in Season 2, 482 in Season 3 and 506 in Season 4. The following charts illustrate the total of games missed by players at each A-League Club in the first 4 seasons:

Figure 1: % Games Missed by A-League Club, Seasons 1 - 4



UNAVAILABILITY OF PLAYERS

Table 2 details the number of players unavailable at each club during the 2008/09 season due to injury/illness.

Perth Glory had the highest average of injured players per round in the 2008/09 Season with 4.57 injured players. Sydney FC had the second highest average with 4.33. These figures were well above the remaining teams with Wellington Phoenix managing the lowest average of injured players per round with 1.29.

Table 2: Unavailability of Players per Round/Club, 2008/2009

A-LEAGUE CLUB									
Rd.	ADU	CCM	MEL	NUJ	PER	QLD	SFC	WPX	Avg.
1	4	6	3	2	4	2	3	1	3.13
2	6	4	4	2	5	2	5	1	3.63
3	4	4	3	1	5	2	6	1	3.25
4	4	4	1	1	3	2	4	1	2.50
5	3	4	2	3	3	2	4	2	2.88
6	2	4	2	2	3	2	3	1	2.38
7	5	5	2	4	4	1	3	2	3.25
8	2	4	-	2	3	2	3	2	2.57
9	3	3	-	2	5	3	4	2	3.14
10	6	4	1	2	3	4	6	1	3.38
11	3	3	2	2	3	4	5	2	3.00
12	4	3	3	2	4	3	4	1	3.00
13	4	1	2	2	4	3	3	1	2.50
14	2	2	-	4	4	5	5	1	3.29
15	2	1	-	4	4	5	5	2	3.29
16	2	2	-	4	5	4	6	1	3.43
17	2	2	-	3	6	4	5	1	3.29
18	4	3	-	4	6	3	4	1	3.57
19	3	2	-	5	6	4	5	1	3.71
20	7	3	-	5	8	2	6	1	4.57
21	5	2	-	6	8	3	2	1	3.86
Avg	3.67	3.14	2.27	2.95	4.57	2.95	4.33	1.29	

The results achieved by Adelaide United are noteworthy, with the club having the third highest injury rate despite the demands of the 2008 AFC Asian Champions League and the FIFA Club World Cup. For instance, the club's commitments saw Adelaide United skipper Travis Dodd make 40 appearances in all for his club, in line with the highest professional demands in the world game.

Table 3 groups the number of games missed into 3 time periods, providing a guide as to when games were missed due to injuries throughout the 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 seasons. Throughout the last 4 seasons of the A-League, the highest amount of injuries occurred during the last 7 games of the season. This will require tight monitoring as the A-League season is extended to 27 regular season rounds from 2009/2010, and players spend increased times travelling, playing mid-week matches and playing in hot and temperate climates.

Table 3: Seasonal Timing of Injury, Seasons 1 - 4

Round	2005 / 2006 *		2006 / 2007		2007/2008		2008/2009		Average	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1 to 7	92	27.7	125	30.6	139	28.8	168	33.2	131	30.1
8 to 14	116	34.8	145	35.5	160	33.2	158	31.2	144.8	33.6
15 to 21	125	37.5	138	33.9	183	38	180	35.6	156.5	36.3
TOTAL	333	100	408	100	482	100	506	100	432.3	100

* Figures for the 2005/06 season are based on available data only.

NUMBER, TYPE AND RECOVERY PERIOD FOR INJURIES

The type of injury and number of games missed for the 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 seasons are detailed in **Table 4**.

The highest averages of games missed by injury type for season 2008/09 were: knee 145 (29%), ankle sprains/joint injuries 89 (18%), groin strains/osteitis pubis 57 (11%) and hamstring strains 25 (9.5%). Combined these types of injuries accounted for over 60 % of all games missed through injury.

There is a significant increase of ankle sprains/joint injuries, from 37 games missed in 2007/08 (7.7%), to 89 games missed in 2008/09 (18%), and a decrease in quadriceps strains from 63 (13%) in 2007/08 to 21 (4.2%) in 2008/09. The number of hamstring injuries and calf strains remained approximately the same between 2007/08 and 2008/09 seasons.

In all the A-League seasons thus far, knee injuries remained the number 1 recorded injury for A-League players.

Table 4: Games Missed by Injury Type, Seasons 1 - 4

Type of Injury	2005/2006 *		2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Ankle sprains/ Joint injuries	41	12	56	14	37	7.7	89	18
Lower back	4	1.2	22	5.4	6	1.2	1	0.2
Calf strains	10	3	12	2.9	29	6	31	6.1
Foot injuries	1	0.3	14	3.4	6	1.2	13	2.6
Groin strains/ Osteitis pubis	38	11	84	21	21	4.4	57	11
Hamstring strains	25	7.5	57	14	51	11	48	9.5
Hip injuries	8	2.4	24	5.9	0	0	9	1.7
Knee: ACL, MCL, cartilage	93	28	81	20	140	29	145	29
Quadriceps strain	3	0.9	10	2.5	63	13	21	4.2
Leg	25	7.5	12	2.9	35	7.3	21	4.2
Shin	20	6	2	0.5	1	0.2	0	0
Hernia	20	6.5	0	0	0	0	6	1.2
Fractured Check-bone	14	4.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fractured Collar-bone	0	0	7	1.7	0	0	0	0
Glandular Fever	17	5.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shoulder	0	0	14	3.4	38	7.9	19	3.8
Other	14	4.1	13	3.2	55	11	46	9.1
TOTAL	333	100	408	100	482	100	506	100

*Figures for the 2005/06 season are based on available data only.

INCIDENCE OF INJURY

Table 5 shows the number of players who were injured at each club, how many separate injuries occurred per club and the total number of matches that were missed.

According to the data below, players succumbed to injury more than once during a season. For example, Adelaide United had 16 players who were injured while the club registered 23 injury occurrences during the season, indicating that some players were injured multiple times. Moreover, some clubs were struck with long term injuries that had a major impact on their performance.

Table 5: Incidence of Injury, 2008/2009

Club	No. of Players Injured per Club	No. of Injuries per Club	Total Number of Matches Missed
Adelaide United	16	23	77
Central Coast Mariners	12	15	66
Melbourne Victory	10	10	25
Newcastle Jets	13	14	62
Perth Glory	18	24	96
Queensland Roar	13	16	62
Sydney FC	15	20	91
Wellington Phoenix	7	7	27
TOTAL	104	129	506

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The key findings in this report see:

- the total number of games missed through injury for all A-League clubs has increased over the past 2 seasons. In 2008/09, total games missed were 506 (avg. 63) an increase of 24 from 2007/08 season which consisted of 482 (avg. 60);
- over the 4 seasons of the A-League, the highest amount of injuries occurred during the last 7 games of the season; and
- the most prevalent type of injuries in order of highest number are knees, followed by ankle sprains/joint injuries, groin strains/osteitis pubis and hamstrings.