Australians strive to be successful at everything we do. This winning mentality is part of our national sporting DNA and is respected and feared by nations we play against.

In Football, unlike most other sports, winning is rarely a product of size, aggression or athleticism. It is based primarily on individual skill and team tactics.

If the Socceroos and Matildas are to win the FIFA World Cup, we need to develop generations of world class, technically gifted players. If Australian players are the most skilful, combined with our winning mentality, we will be a world championship contender.

Traditionally, the majority of Australia’s elite players have been developed by semi-professional National Premier Leagues (NPL) clubs who have provided good quality development environments, with dedicated parents in the background providing the support. A relatively small number of male players have been developed at the elite FFA Centre of Excellence (formerly AIS), with an intake of 20 or so players biennially, and by European Football clubs who have recruited young Australians in their teens.
THE QUESTION IS: CAN WE RELY ON THESE METHODS TO DEVELOP AUSTRALIA’S WORLD CLASS PLAYERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

In the men’s game many of our Asian rivals are investing millions into player development. In Japan, every J-League Club has an elite academy and these are complemented by multiple centrally run training centres. In Qatar, the government has created the Aspire Academy that provides a dedicated environment for elite players and some of the best facilities in the world. European nations invest staggering amounts in club academies and central training centres. In addition, they have worldwide recruiters to identify the best young talent.

In the women’s game, the same trends are emerging. Canada invests more in female player development than male player development. Australia’s women players lack the development opportunities of their overseas counterparts. The W-League has just 12 rounds while comparable overseas leagues have over 20 rounds.

Overseas elite youth players experience a development environment that Australian clubs have struggled to match. In countries like Japan, Belgium and Germany elite youth players train seven times per week and are nurtured by accredited coaches over a 40 week season. Australia currently has 24 players at the FFA Centre of Excellence (formerly AIS) that enjoy a similar environment. Meanwhile, Germany has approximately 5,000 and Belgium, with an overall playing population smaller than our own has 2,000 youth players nurtured in this environment.

In 2015, the player development system is highly exclusive. Players are often required to travel extensively to clubs and many players in elite junior competitions and programs have to pay well over $2,000 per year for their development. Furthermore, many parents are supplementing their child’s development through private academies, many of whom are focused on profit and do not adhere to the National Curriculum.

What does Australia need to do to develop world class players that can compete on the World Stage?
TARGETS

Given that Australia is a prosperous, first-world nation, no Australian youth player should have to go overseas to receive world class development. We need to provide an environment that reassures every Australian player that they can be the best they can be by staying in Australia.

We have created a “Starting 11 of guiding principles”, that Football needs to deliver to ensure Australia can compete with the world’s best:

STARTING XI - GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

1. **Introductory Football courses will focus on kids having FUN!**
   Before kids can play like a pro, they must enjoy playing the game like a kid.
   Elite Football should not start until children are aged 12.

2. **No talent selection, but instead talent identification**
   At a young age players should be selected on their potential, not just because they are bigger, faster or stronger.

3. **Every youth player in every youth team needs an educated coach**
   An educated coach is one who has been educated in the necessary behaviours and the National Curriculum to train aspiring players.

4. **Every youth player will have access to top quality facilities**
   Whether it is on grass pitches, school pitches, Futsal courts or synthetic pitches, youth players need to play Football regularly on top quality surfaces.

5. **The pathway needs an individual approach for every player**
   Football needs to be flexible to the individual needs and circumstances of every player in the pathway.
A network of scouts will record players into one centralised talent ID system
Football needs knowledgeable, certified scouts who focus on talent identification.

Quality talent development is not about results in youth matches
Developing skilful players with a winning mentality does not mean abandoning the ‘Australian Way’ so as to come first on the under 13 competition ladder.

FFA development programs will be decentralised to increase the number of players in the pathway
FFA development programs, which means those administered directly by the FFA or via Member Federations, must go to the players, rather than expecting players to come to a central location.

Australia needs a minimum of 500 elite youth players at every age level
This will result in Australia having a combined pool of 3,000 boys and girls from aged 12 to 19 in an elite environment and will provide a prodigious pipeline of talent for Top Tier clubs and National Teams.

Top elite youth players will not be excluded from the pathway for financial reasons
Cost barriers must be significantly reduced and a schools competition will provide a platform for any talented Australian to be identified. In the long term Tier One club academies will provide no-cost scholarships.

Elite youth players need to receive a training environment comparable to our rival countries
Elite Youth Players will be any children playing in a Tier One club academy or part of a club academy and a National Development Centre.
BOYS PATHWAY

A-LEAGUE + INTERNATIONAL LEAGUES

NATIONAL YOUTH LEAGUE + NATIONAL PREMIER LEAGUES

TIER 1
SCHOOLS
TIER 2
SCHOOLS
TIER 3

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMS

NATIONAL TEAMS

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRES
BOYS AUSTRALIAN PATHWAY

Stakeholders will work through a suitable process to identify the specific criteria of each of these components. Each component will then be periodically reviewed to ensure it attains world class standards.

**Development Programs** will afford young players an opportunity to experience an enhanced Football environment which will prepare them for the technical and tactical challenges of elite Football. Existing development programs like the Skill Acquisition Program (SAP) and Skilleroos will be expanded to increase the number of kids entering the pathway.

**Tier One Club Academies** will be licensed under a national system. They will typically be run by A-League clubs; however any club will have the opportunity to reach Tier One status. They will work in collaboration with schools to provide an elite environment for all their players. In the long term, Tier One club academies will provide no-cost scholarships. Academies will be fairly compensated for their player development efforts.

**Tier Two Club Academies** will be licensed under a national system. They will typically be operated by NPL clubs; however any club will have the opportunity to reach Tier Two status. Academies will provide talented players with access to top quality coaching and facilities for a fair price. They will work in collaboration with schools to provide an elite environment for all their players. The best players from Tier Two club academies will receive additional training at National Development Centres. Academies will be fairly compensated for their player development efforts.

**Tier Three Club Academies** will be licensed under a national system. They will typically be operated by NPL clubs; however any club will have the opportunity to reach Tier Three status. Academies will provide talented players with access to quality coaching and facilities for a fair price. The best players from Tier Three club academies will receive additional training at National Development Centres. Academies will be fairly compensated for their player development efforts.

**National Development Centres.** FFA and Member Federation Centres will provide elite training to top prospects. Training will be in addition to the training they receive from their Tier Two/Three Club Academy. Players who are playing/training for Tier Two/Three academies and training at National Development Centres will be in an elite environment. Centres will be prevalent throughout the country. During the NPL season centres will provide training only.
Schools have two key roles to play in the elite player pathway:

- Schools will provide an opportunity for players to receive additional training to their club training. Schools will work closely with club academies to deliver the best environment possible for youth players in accordance with the National Curriculum.

- Schools provide an opportunity for all Australians to be involved in Football and, as such, an annual National Schools Competition will provide an inclusive and no-cost opportunity for players to be scouted by Academies and National Development Centres.

The Season. Elite youth players require a 40 week season.

- Tier One, Tier Two and Tier Three Club academies will play in the junior NPL competition.

- After the NPL season has finished a league consisting of Tier One Club Academies and National Development Centres (comprised of the best players from Tier Two/Three Academies) will play a further competition.

FUTSAL

- Futsal provides boys and girls with an important opportunity to develop technical skills.

- Futsal must be a key component of any player development pathway, particularly, at the introductory and development program level.

- In the long term Australian football will develop a separate pathway for talented FUTSAL player’s which allows them to focus on this format of the game and compete at the highest level.
GIRLS PATHWAY

- U21: W-LEAGUE + INTERNATIONAL LEAGUES
- U18: SCHOOLS
- U12: GIRLS ACADEMIES
- U9: DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
- U9: INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMS

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

NATIONAL TEAMS
Girls’ player development faces unique challenges and, as such, requires a unique pathway. Stakeholders will work through a suitable process to identify the specific criteria of each of these components. Each component will then be periodically reviewed to ensure it attains world class standards.

**Development Programs** will afford young players an opportunity to experience an enhanced Football environment which will prepare them for the technical and tactical challenges of elite Football. Existing development programs like the Skill Acquisition Program (SAP) and Skilleroos will be expanded to increase the number of kids entering the pathway. Girls will be afforded opportunities in both a mixed and single sex environment.

**Girls Academies** will typically be run by W-League clubs; however WNPL clubs will also have the opportunity to run Girls Academies. They will work in collaboration with schools to provide an elite environment for all their players. In the long-term, Girls Academies will provide a no-cost pathway for players. Youth academy teams will compete in the Boys’ junior NPL competition.

**National Development Centres.** FFA and Member Federation Centres will provide elite training to top prospects. Training will be in addition to the training they receive from their Club Academy. Players who are playing/training for a Girls academy and training at National Development Centres will be in an elite environment. Centres will be prevalent throughout the country. During the NPL season centres will provide training only.

**Schools** have two key roles to play in the elite player pathway:
- Schools will provide an opportunity for players to receive additional training to their club training. Schools will work closely with club academies to deliver the best environment possible for youth players in accordance with the National Curriculum.
- Schools provide an opportunity for all Australians to be involved in Football and, as such, a National Girls Schools Competition will provide an inclusive and no-cost opportunity for players to be scouted by Academies and National Development Centres.

**W-League** will provide a high class competition for our players. An overseas partner league will enable our elite players to play in a top competition for 10 months of the year as they split time between the W-League and a major overseas league.