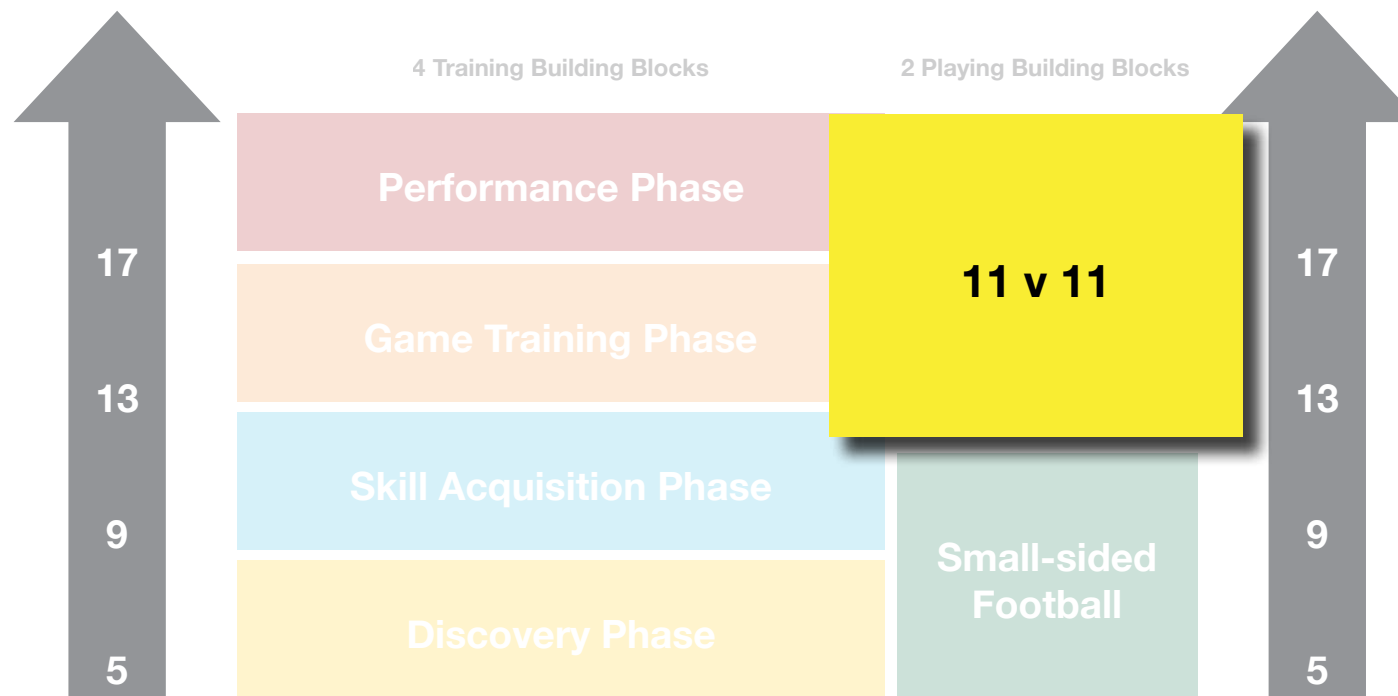


3.

11 v 11



- From U/12 at the earliest
- The weekly game is a vital developmental element for young players
- The game is the frame of reference that tells us if we are improving
- Only in a regular, year-round competition environment can game cleverness, game hardness and game experience be developed
- The game is for players (not for the coach)

11 v 11

In the opinion of FFA, the full 11 v 11 game should be played from U/12 at the earliest. Worldwide, many experts are of the opinion that even this is too early and it's better to wait till after the growth spurt.

There is general consensus though on the fact that a weekly game is a vital element for the development of young players because the game is the frame of reference that tells us if we are improving. Only in a regular, year-round competition environment can players develop game cleverness, game hardness and game experience.

In youth football the development of the INDIVIDUAL should come first NOT the team result, something many coaches (and parents) often seem to forget.

In order to develop players to the maximum of their potential, they need to continuously be challenged to raise their individual bar.

Therefore each player should train and play at a level that is most appropriate for his/her actual development stage. If the level of resistance is too low and it's too easy, players do not develop. If the level of resistance is too high and it's too difficult, they do not develop either.

This is why the best must train with the best and play against the best.

This also explains why quality competitions are such a vital element of the development pathway.

In order to improve the competition structures as well as the structure and quality of club youth academies in Australia, FFA has introduced the Talented Player Pathway **Three Pillar Structure**.

The Three Pillar Structure is aimed at drastically raising the quality, accessibility and clarity of the Talented Player Pathway in Australia. The Three Pillar Structure is a work in progress though and still contains gaps.

Therefore FFA together with the Member Federations have taken ownership of parts of the National Talented Player Pathway whereas in most countries in the world youth development is undertaken by the (professional) clubs.

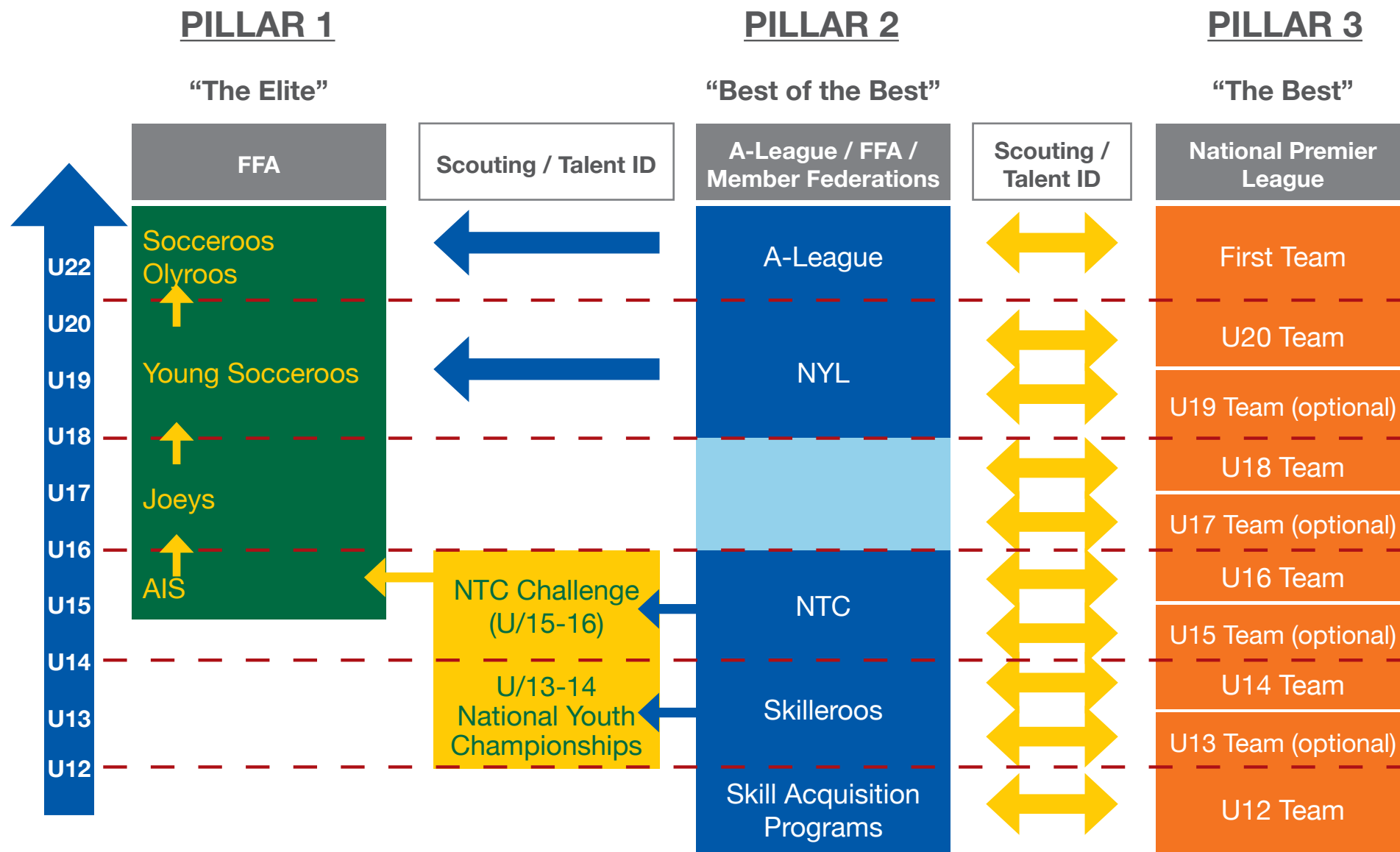
On the next pages you will find an explanation of the Three Pillar Structure of the male Elite Player Pathway.

The Female Elite Player Pathway Re-Structure together with the National Competitions Review for Women's Football is still in progress and accordingly is not available for inclusion in this publication. Although the starting points are identical, there will be certain differences in the pathway structure for girls and women.



3.

The Three Pillar Structure



Pillar 1: The Elite

The first pillar consists of the men's National Team programs which are the specific responsibility of FFA (AIS/Joeys, Young Socceroos, Olyroos and Socceroos).

The male national team pathway starts with the AIS program.

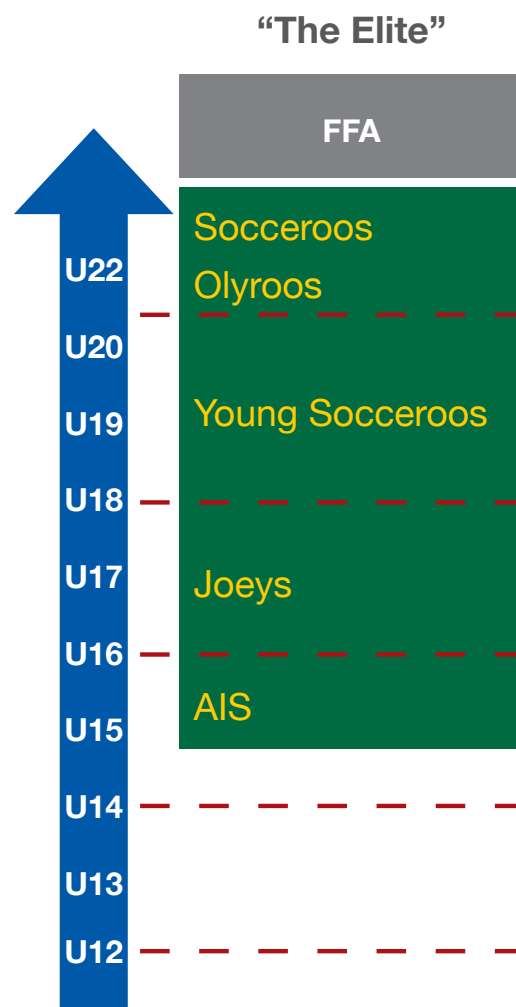
This is a 2 year full time program at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in Canberra for the best Australian U/16-17 boys.

The players for this top level program of international standards are primarily recruited from the underpinning State and Territory National Training Centre (NTC) programs.

The AIS team participates in the National Youth League (NYL) and ideally the AIS squad is the same group of players that form the Australian U/17 team (the 'Joeys').

This program prepares the players for the AFC U/16 Championships and the U/17 World Cup (subject to qualification) that are held every 2 years.

Graduates from the AIS program generally continue their playing career with National Youth League (NYL) or A-League clubs or are being contracted by overseas clubs.



The next national representative team are the Young Socceroos for U/19-20 year old players. The Young Socceroos program is a 'camp based' program, since the majority of players are contracted NYL or A-League players or playing for overseas clubs. It is a 2 year program comprising of the U/19 AFC Qualifiers and Championships, the latter being the qualification tournament for the U/20 World Cup held every 2 years.

The Olyroos program is for U/22-23 year old players. Every two years they participate in the U/22 AFC Qualifiers and Championships, and every 4 years these Championships are the qualification tournament for the Olympic Games.

The last and most important step in the pathway is of course the Socceroos. The majority of Australia's top senior players are playing for overseas clubs, several of them in European top leagues. But recently more players from the A-League are being selected for the Socceroos which underlines the increasing quality of our domestic competition.

Every 4 years the Socceroos must qualify for the FIFA World Cup. Every 4 years the AFC also organises the Asian Championships (usually the year after the World Cup).

For both events there is a staged qualification process for countries that are members of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

3.

The Three Pillar Structure

Pillar 2: The Best of the Best

The second pillar consists of the combined FFA/ Member Federations programs, the National Youth League (NYL) teams and the A-League clubs.

The Skill Acquisition Programs (SAP) are programs aiming for talented boys aged U/14 and under, with the emphasis on developing the functional game skills as explained earlier in this chapter (the Skill Acquisition Phase).

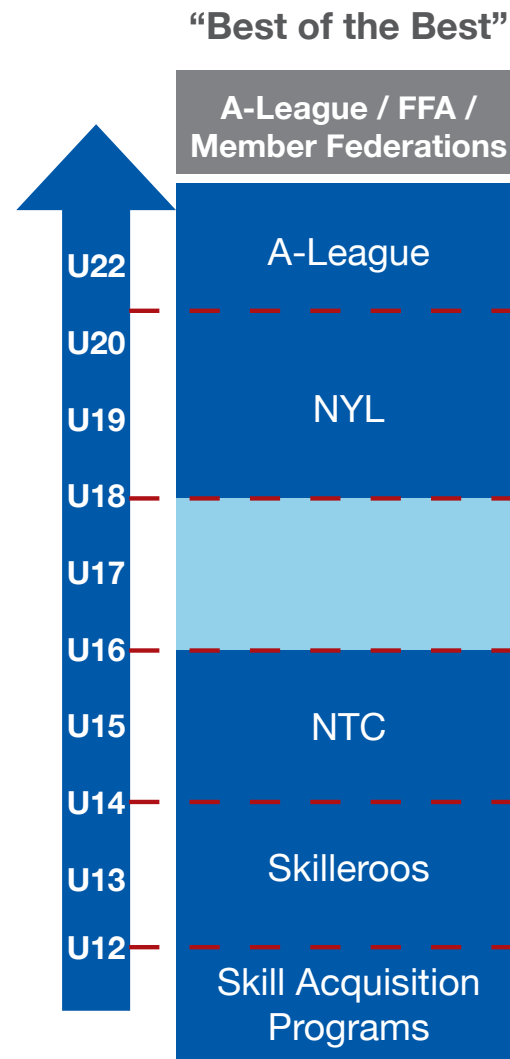
There is at least one SAP program in every State and Territory and the so-called 'Skilleroos' squads (U/13-14) form the pinnacle of these programs.

There are yearly U/13 and 14 National Youth Championships to identify the most talented players in these age brackets.

The SAP is the first level of the National Talented Player Pathway for every boy that dreams of one day wearing the 'Green and Gold'.

Graduates from the SAP programs enter the National Training Centre (NTC) programs aimed at talented U/15-16 boys in every State and Territory.

The focus of these programs is on developing an understanding of the team tasks and individual player tasks as explained earlier in this chapter (the Game Training Phase).



There is a yearly 'NTC challenge' to identify the most talented U/15-16 year old players for the AIS program that leads into the National U/17 team, the 'Joeys'.

The National Youth League (NYL) teams of the A-League clubs should form the next step for NTC graduates to continue their playing career at elite level.

Reality, however, shows that this step is often too big since many NYL teams are made up of 18-21 year olds and senior first team players.

Ideally we should bridge the current U16-U18 gap in Pillar 2 (light blue box in the diagram). FFA, together with the Member Federations and the A-League clubs are currently discussing possible solutions.

FFA's preferred solution is the so-called 'integrated pathway'. This means fusing together the FFA/ Member Federation programs with the local A-League clubs. Pillar 2 will then consist of the A-League and NYL teams underpinned by U/12-18 'academies' thus creating another important building block in Australia's Talented Player Pathway.

The current SAP and NTC program structure would then need revising and restructuring and appropriate solutions need to be in place for States and Territories that do not have an A-League club. It's worth mentioning that some A-League clubs, such as Newcastle Jets, in conjunction with FFA and their Member Federation, have already established academies in line with this philosophy.

Pillar 3: The Best

The third pillar is being created as a result of the National Competitions Review (NCR) and will create a competition for Elite Clubs at the highest level below the A-League in every State and Territory across Australia.

The name of these competitions is 'The National Premier League' (NPL). These 'Elite' clubs are selected and identified through an Elite Club Licensing Program that is being phased in from 2013 onwards. The purpose is to drastically raise the quality and quantity of youth development by improving and standardising the structure of these clubs. To obtain a license for the National Premier League, clubs must (amongst many others) meet criteria regarding:

- **Teams:** NPL clubs must have teams in all age groups from first grade to U/12's;
- **Youth development:** NPL clubs must have a long-term youth development mindset. Through

the introduction of a points system an NPL club can only raise a competitive first team by filling it predominantly with young, self developed players;

- **Coaching:** To guarantee the quality of coaching all NPL clubs must appoint a Technical Director and appropriately accredited coaches for all age group teams. The Technical Director must ensure that the National Football Curriculum is implemented;
- **Finance:** It will be mandatory for NPL clubs to publicise their registration fee structure in order to put a halt to the culture of using youth players and their parents as the source of income to fund the first grade.

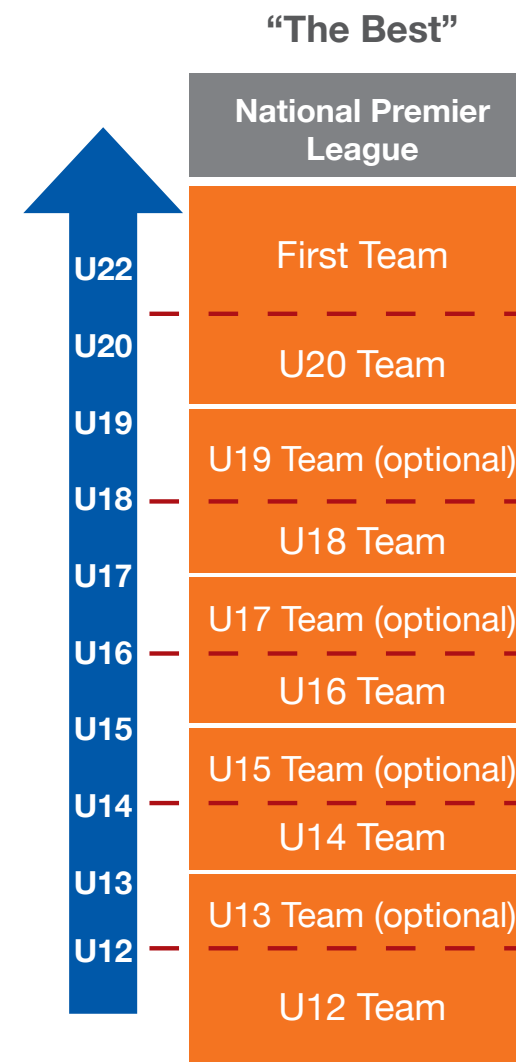
Other criteria will focus on governance, facilities, organisational structure, membership protection, medical provisions, reporting structure and so on.

A final important objective of the National Competitions Review will be a gradual extension of the youth season to 10 months (including

competitions and training), which will bring Australia more into line with world's best practice. Whilst access to facilities outside of the winter period will be an obstacle, FFA will work with Member Federations to establish strategies which will provide greater access to football facilities.

The three pillar structure will not only drastically increase the quality of youth development but at the same time create far more opportunities for talented players. The expectation is justifiable that the majority of Australia's talented players will be gathered in these three pillars with the opportunity to switch from one pillar to another at any stage of their development. A late developer can be identified in the third pillar at any stage of his development and be transferred to Pillar Two (or even One).

If on the other hand the pathway for a player in Pillar Two stops, the player has the opportunity to continue his playing career on a quality level in Pillar Three. Through this three pillar structure the pathways will be much clearer for both players and their parents.



3.

The Three Pillar Structure



FFA recognises that State and Territory based clubs have long played an important role in developing talented young players, and that they will play an increasingly important role in youth development in the future.

Assessing current Socceroos and A-League club squads, the vast majority of players are known to have risen through these clubs. With the implementation of the Elite Club Licensing program it is expected that many more young players of an even higher technical quality will be produced by the NPL club system. For this reason, FFA will officially recognise these accredited elite clubs as part of the Elite Player Pathway.

In the new three pillars pathway structure, the “best of the best” will continue to be selected for State/Territory or National programs (e.g. Skilleroos; NTC; AIS), where players will be exposed to year-round football in an elite or professional environment, ideally at no cost.

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