



Qantas Olyroos selections limited to 3 players per club

Football Federation Australia (FFA) has today announced that the Qantas Olyroos squad selection for next month's AFC Asian Qualifiers for the 2012 London Olympic Games will be limited to three players per club. The voluntary limit has been put in place by FFA following extensive consultations with Hyundai A-League clubs affected by player call ups for the Qantas Olyroos. The Qantas Olyroos play Uzbekistan in Tashkent on Sunday 5 February and the United Arab Emirates in Al Ain on Wednesday 22 February. "The impact on the A-League clubs is something we always take into consideration when developing the under-age national teams program," said FFA National Technical Director, Han Berger. "In this case, Aurelio Vidmar is confident he can select a very strong squad within the limits of using no more than three players per club."

"As a result, the A-League clubs can plan with some certainty for the period when the players will be away for these very important Olympic qualification matches."

In addition, the travel plans for the Qantas Olyroos have been adjusted in the interests of player welfare. This will enable A-League players selected for the February matches to play for their club in Week 17 matches (26 January – 29 January) before departing for Tashkent. The provisional plan was for two separate trips

away for the February matches, with the players returning to their A-League clubs in between. "Having considered all the options, we believe the long-haul flights should be minimised by having one trip away to take in the two matches," said Berger. "This is in the best interests of the players' health and well-being, as well as the best interests of the clubs. The players will now be available for Week 17 matches due to the slightly later departure for Tashkent and will return to their clubs in better condition because of the reduced travel."

"The new travel plans don't extend the time the players are away from their clubs, it just makes the trip in one block of days rather than two separate blocks. "I would like to thank all the A-League coaches and football directors involved in this planning. The logistics are never easy in these circumstances, but I believe we now have the best outcome possible for the players, the Olympic campaign and the A-League clubs."

Aurelio Vidmar is expected to name his 18-player squad on 16 January. FFA continues to talk with European and Asian clubs about the release of eligible Australian players. The AFC Asian qualifiers for the 2012 London Olympic Games are not scheduled on FIFA dates reserved for international fixtures, meaning overseas clubs are under no formal obligation to release players.

Phoenix yet to fill in Smith's new contract

The American's short-term contract expires on January 16 and he is yet to hear whether he will be retained by the Wellington club. But the 26-year-old, who will probably start from the bench today against Perth, realises that the decision is out of his hands.

"It's not ideal," Smith told the Herald on Sunday, "but I try to put it out of my mind. I'm pretty comfortable with the way I have been playing and usually these things work themselves out. I've enjoyed my time here and think I've been playing some pretty good football."

Smith has yet to talk to coach Ricki Herbert but figures it will happen "fairly soon". His philosophical attitude is understandable when you consider the ups and downs he has endured during his football career. After graduating from college football in Texas, Smith had a season with FC Dallas in the MLS before walking out after one season.

He says it was due to a series of "bad experiences" with the business side of the sport, though also admits now that he was a bit of a "young hothead" back then.

He quit football and ventured to Australia with no plans, hanging up his boots for a while

as he enjoyed a Downunder adventure. After a few years away from the game, Smith signed with Fraser Park in the NSW Super League, eventually catching the eye and joining Sydney Olympic in the NSW Premier League. After a goal-a-game stint with Sydney Olympic, he trialled unsuccessfully for Gold Coast United in 2010 but was signed by Gold Coast coach Miron Bleiberg the following year. He and his fiancée moved to the Coast but, during pre-season training, an ankle injury put him out for a month. In the meantime the club decided they preferred Maceo Rigters, who had just finished a trial period with the Phoenix.

Smith was released, though the club paid out his newly-linked contract in full. "At the time, I was pretty angry," says Smith. "Now I can see where [Bleiberg] was coming from but it was tough."

We had a six-month lease on a house and had just bought new furniture [which is still in storage] and I felt like I was back to square one."

Concerned by Smith's plight, Gold Coast and All Whites goalkeeper Glen Moss recommended him to Phoenix coach Ricki Herbert. After a trial period, he was signed as injury

cover for three months, and earned a two-month extension in November. Smith has made nine appearances, including five starts, for the Wellington club. He has been versatile, playing up front as well as centre and wide midfield without ever making one position his own. "I'm happy to fill in where needed," admits Smith, "and could even play fullback if required."

Today the Phoenix will be looking for some revenge against Perth after a 0-1 reverse across the Tasman earlier this season, when they dominated the match. The Wellington side will also hope to continue a strong run which has seen them score nine goals in their last two matches at Westpac Stadium. "We played well over there and didn't take anything from it," says Smith. "They are very physical in midfield and try to push you around."

Hopefully we can assert ourselves and then their travelling legs should kick in after about 60 minutes or so."

Looking ahead, the Phoenix travel to Gold Coast next week, a game Smith is set to relish – even if it could be his last. "I'm looking forward to it," he says. "It's not that personal but I have to admit I would love to score and play well against them."