



By George Stavroulakis

FFA seeks new 'strong leader'

Australia needs a strong leader to revamp player development...which is why former technical director Eric Abrams was axed in July, a Football Federation Australia executive has admitted.

The former Belgian youth coach - who helped develop stars like Eden Hazard and Vincent Kompany - exited the FFA shortly after the Socceroos' disappointing World Cup.

While strong in other areas, the campaign was undermined by a lack of Australian goalscorers coming through the system.

The frontline attack of the Socceroos in Russia had scored just 28 international goals from 201 matches between them and critics have questioned the pathway for local strikers who are frequently ignored in the A-League.

Marquee stars have tended to hog the key positions while NPL strikers have struggled to make the switch from semi-pro to the demands of the A-League in the face of foreign imports.

Meanwhile the next generation of Australian stars have



largely disappointed on the international stage of youth tournaments.

Abrams was appointed in 2014 but last year compared the NPL to the Belgian fourth division, adding: "I was not happy with the quality I saw."

After Abrams was axed, the FFA launched an immediate hunt for a new technical director and put together a high-powered panel to identify the right person.

National coaches Graham Arnold and Alen Stajcic were joined by ex-international stars Rae Downer and Tony Vidmar along with PFA chief John Didiluca to pinpoint the best person for the job.

he panel was supposed to have appointed a new TD in November but the recent FFA boardroom coup overtook everything and pushed back a final date for the appointment. But FFA's head of youth development Emma Highwood has told the FTBL Podcast Abrams' shortcomings would need to be addressed by whoever comes in to replace him.

"If we are really serious about developing better players all levels, on the men's and the women's pathway, we have to have a stronger focus on the player and what's in the players' needs and player development," she said.

"But I would say the FFA needs to take the lead on that and we need a strong leader in that space.

Nabbout clinches trophy, concerns remain

One of last season's feel good stories has picked up a prestigious domestic trophy, but it's hardly positive news.

Andrew Nabbout's Urawa Red Diamonds won the Emperor's Cup overnight, pipping Vegalta Sendai 1-0 to continue manager Oswaldo Oliveira's incredible record in Japanese football.

Yet the Brazilian manager doesn't seem to think much of the Socceroos' World Cup striker, who is yet to score a goal for the Japanese giants after 15 appearances for the club across all competitions.

Although Nabbout was an

unused substitute in the final, he played only nine minutes in the entire competition. The Aussie has only started two J-League matches since joining the club, including his debut, and only four total across all three competitions.

The 25-year-old suffered a shoulder injury in May that kept him out of action until September, but despite experiencing a solid run of four matches off the bench after rejoining the squad, he was left



out of the side entirely for the last two J-League matches of the season.

After working his way into a dream World Cup run under Bert van Marwijk, Nabbout now seems an outsider to make an impact at next month's Asian Cup, with Martin Boyle, Tomi Juric and Jamie Maclaren all

seemingly ahead in Graham Arnold's strikers' stakes.

Coincidentally, his former standout teammate Dimitri Petratos has also had an underwhelming season at Newcastle, leaving a very real prospect that none of the Newcastle Jets' resurgent talents last season will be involved in the

upcoming Socceroos tournament.

After a poor start to the season, Urawa made a comeback to finish fifth. In other Aussies Abroad news, Ange Postecoglou - who recently committed to stay in Japan as manager of Yokohama F Marinos - finished 12th.