



By George Stavroulakis

Socceroos will host Nepal at GIO Stadium

The Socceroos will host Nepal at GIO Stadium in Canberra for the team's first home match on the road to Qatar 2022.

Australia's fixture against Nepal on Thursday October 10 will mark the first match the Socceroos have played in the nation's capital since a 3-0 win over Kyrgyz Republic in November 2015.

Tickets to the game will go on sale from 1pm on August 13. **The match** is part of an agreed series of elite matches involving the Socceroos, Matildas, and Young Matildas to be played in Canberra over the next 18 months as part of the ACT Government's joint-investment with Capital Football to build a new 'Home of Football' in Canberra. **Chief Executive** David Gallop said the FFA was pleased to move swiftly to schedule a key match for the Socceroos in Canberra.

"Football is the largest team sport in Canberra with nearly 40,000 registered outdoor participants, so it is great that the football community of the ACT, and sports fans generally, will be able to watch the Socceroos live at GIO Stadium this October," Gallop said.

"Recently the ACT Government made a significant commitment to football by guaranteeing their support for the development of a new and modern 'Home of Football' in Canberra, which is expected to be operational during the second half of 2021.

"The selection of Canberra for this important Socceroos fixture is, in part, down to the ACT Government's fantastic pledge for the game, and we're sure a large and vocal crowd of Australian supporters will get behind the team in what will be their first game on Australian soil in almost a year.»

Coach Graham Arnold – currently in Europe monitoring players – welcomed the news.



"Canberra's sporting community can take great pride in the fantastic Socceroos that the region has helped to develop over the years," Arnold said.

"Players like Ned Zelic, Carl Valeri and Tom Rogic are representative of the elite talent that has emerged from the area, and who continue to fly the flag for football in

the nation's capital.

"As a team we will arrive in Canberra focused and determined to produce a great Socceroos performance – one that we expect will not only help us on our journey to Qatar, but leave a positive and long-lasting impression for everyone that comes to watch us play Nepal."

32 nation FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023

FFA have thrown their support behind FIFA's decision to expand the 2023 World Cup to 32 teams, reconfirming their eagerness to host the tournament.

Australia are one of only two confirmed bidders in the race for the prized competition, which FIFA unanimously elected to expand to 32 teams following the success of France's showpiece this year.

"Australia stands ready to work with FIFA to deliver an historic 32 nation FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023," FFA Chair, Mr Chris Nikou, said.

"The groundwork that has been completed by our Bid Team, which includes gaining the official support of the New South Wales Government as recently as Tuesday this week, means that Australia is well advanced in many of the elements required to Bid to host the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023.

«This follows an earlier commitment of support for FFA's bid by the Commonwealth Government of Australia, including the provision of \$5m in funding to prepare a bid.

"FFA will await the updated documentation

from FIFA and, once received, will work diligently with relevant stakeholders to adjust features of our original and ongoing planning to address the expanded competition requirements.»

Nikou said FIFA's decision to expand the tournament serves to increase Australia's interest in hosting.

It comes shortly after FIFA President, Gianni Infantino, announced the total prize pool for female footballers be doubled to \$60 million USD.

"Australia's appetite to host the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023 is only enhanced by the news received overnight.

«We are resolute in our belief that a FIFA Women's World Cup hosted in Australia offers truly limitless possibilities that will not only herald a new chapter in women's football, but also provide a platform for change that can transcend the game across the region and beyond.»

2023 World Cup... FIFA expands from 24 to 32 teams

FIFA has unanimously voted to increase the 2023 World Cup from 24 to 32 teams, passing the decision remotely overnight.

While FIFA would usually have to hold a general meeting to discuss changes such as this, the decision was rushed in with bidding for the 2023 World Cup hosting rights already underway.

The World Cup expansion comes in light of the public and financial success of the 2019 World Cup in France.

It is currently unclear as to the qualification breakdown for the 2023 tournament will be structured across confederations.

"The astounding success of this year's FIFA Women's World Cup in France made it very clear that this is the time to keep the momentum going and take concrete steps to foster the growth of women's football. I am glad to see this proposal – the first of several becoming a reality," said FIFA President Gianni Infantino.

"The expansion reaches far beyond the eight additional participating teams; it means that, from now on, dozens more member associations will organise their women's football programme knowing they have a realistic chance of qualifying. The FIFA Women's World Cup is the most powerful trigger for the professionalisation of the women's game, but it comes but once every four years and is only the top of a much greater pyramid.

«In the meantime, we all have a duty to do the groundwork and strengthen women's football development infrastructure across all confederations.» **Australia and** Japan are the only currently confirmed bidders for the 2023 tournament, with several other nations tipped to enter the running to host the event.