

Australia U-23 to play New Zealand U-23 in two-match series

Australia's U-23 men's football team will gain valuable international match minutes together in early September when Football Federation Australia (FFA) hosts New Zealand in a two-match series in New South Wales.

Australia will take on New Zealand at WIN Stadium in Wollongong (Friday, 6 September) and Campbelltown Stadium in Campbelltown (Monday, 9 September) as both nations seek to advance their preparations for forthcoming Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games qualification tournaments.

In January, Australia's U-23s will travel to Thailand to compete in the 2020 AFC U-23 Championship. At that tournament, the top three teams will earn the right to join host nation Japan as Asia's representatives at Tokyo 2020.

Meanwhile, New Zealand's U-23s will venture to Fiji later in September to participate in the 2019 OFC U-23 Championship. The victor of that competition will seal a place as Oceania's representative in Japan.

"We are delighted to have been able to schedule two international friendlies for our under 23s on home soil ahead of the 2020 AFC U-23 Championship," FFA Chief Executive Officer, Mr David Gallop AM, said.

"These fixtures, combined with further preparatory games and camps that are in the pipeline for later in 2019, will help set the platform for the team's bid to qualify for Tokyo.

"Importantly, the fixtures will also provide supporters in Wollongong and Campbelltown with the chance to watch some of Australia's brightest young footballers, including many from the Hyundai A-League, on their doorstep."

Caltex Socceroos Head Coach Graham Arnold said the fixtures represented a great chance for the squad to gel as the countdown to January's important Asian Championship continues.

"The boys did a great job in Cambodia in March to qualify for the 2020 AFC U-23 Championship," Arnold said. "Now it's important that we get them together regularly in the lead up to January so that they are as prepared as possible to



achieve the target of earning a place at the Olympics."

Additionally, with the Caltex Socceroos playing FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ qualification matches in September, October, and November 2019, Young Socceroos Head Coach Gary van Egmond will serve as Acting Head Coach of Australia's U-23 men's team during these windows. Arnold will be Head Coach of Australia's U-23s for January's tournament in Thailand and continue to oversee the program.

"We are pleased with how this structure will work over the next six months," Arnold added. "With Gary (van Egmond) – who is an Olympian himself – working with the Young Socceroos as well as the under-23s, and myself, Rene Meulensteen and Tony Vidmar focussing on the Socceroos but keeping a close eye on the 23s, the fluid communication and pathway between the squads will be maintained."

NSW Minister for Tourism Stuart Ayres said the two-match series – supported by the NSW Government via tourism and major events agency Destination NSW – was a rare opportunity to support Australia's finest young footballers on their road to Tokyo 2020.

"It's almost eight years since the Olyroos played in Australia, so it's fantastic to have them on home soil and here in NSW for two important matches in preparation for Olympic qualification," Minister Ayres said.

"Football fans from Wollongong, Campbelltown, Sydney and across NSW will enjoy world-class athleticism and skill on the field from Australia's best young Hyundai A-League players, and those who are making their mark in overseas leagues. We know major events such as this showdown drive regional visitation, with thousands of football enthusiasts sure to head south for the big Friday night game.

"New Zealand will be hungry to build momentum leading in to Olympic qualifiers and our near neighbours will be following along, so let's get plenty of local support behind our Olyroos and set them on a solid path to Tokyo 2020."

International Friendlies – Australia U-23 v New Zealand U-23

Date: Friday, 6 September 2019
Venue: WIN Stadium, Wollongong
Kick-off: 7.30pm AEST
Tickets: Tickets to this fixture will go on sale at 9am AEST on Friday, 9 August 2019 – visit www.socceroos.com.au for details

Date: Monday, 9 September 2019
Venue: Campbelltown Stadium, Campbelltown
Kick-off: 7.30pm AEST
Tickets: Tickets to this fixture will go on sale at 9am AEST on Friday, 9 August 2019 – visit www.socceroos.com.au for details

- 1.Nenad Vekic, 2.Nathan Millgate, 3. Giorgio Speranza, 4.Roberto Speranza, 8.Connor Evans, 10.Marko Jelic, 11. Mitchell Mallia 9.Anthony Frangie , 12. James Andrew 40.Damian Tsekenis , 19. Zach Cairncross, 23.Brandon Vella, 28.Martin Fernandez 7.Sean O'Connell , 14.Peter Pelekanos, 17.Kristian Sekutkoski.

