

# AUSTRALIA

Life is less like a box of chocolates (which usually has a flavour guide to limit the unpredictability factor) and more akin to Australia's World Cup squad. Coach Ange Postecoglou will have been in charge for just three friendlies by the time the World Cup comes around, so it's hard to know how the Socceroos will shape up in Brazil.

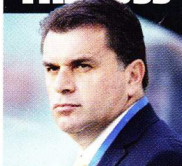
Postecoglou's predecessor, Holger Osieck, was sacked in October after losing 6-0 in consecutive friendlies against Brazil and France. The new coach's squad is young with an element of experimentalism: Australia have no players appearing regularly at a big club.

Renewed positivity is the only clear message to emerge from Postecoglou's 1-0 win over Costa Rica in November and the 4-3 defeat to Ecuador in March – even if Australia did blow a three-goal lead.

#### THE PERCEPTION

A 34-year-old Timmy 'Canute' Cahill's headed corners will not repel the tide of

#### THE BOSS



#### ANGE POSTECOGLU

His Brisbane Roar passed and moved through 36 unbeaten games in 2011-12. The league's most successful coach rejuvenates teams and picks personnel to suit his philosophy.

Spanish-Dutch-Chilean domination. In April, fans of the tournament's lowest-ranked nation – after years of decline under the previous coach – still had only vague notions of their World Cup starting XI; Postecoglou's pups are a squad with one eye on the 2015 Asian Cup.

#### THE REALITY

Pre-tournament game plans hint that Cahill's melon may not be the only fruit. Australia's opponents will be no more familiar with them than they are with each other. A daring approach could see Australia inject some extra zing into Group B.

#### THE MASTERPLAN

Like Osieck's Oz, Postecoglou's side play 4-2-3-1. Before the Ecuador friendly, the coach told winger Tommy Oar (main picture): "Whip it in early and bank on Timmy being there." But the shades of direct old green and gold end there: Australia play out from the back via keeper Mat Ryan's fine distribution, using neat

## Fearlessness may see them pull off the impossible...

passing and a fashionable pressing game. A youthful defence could see them pushing up with a quick and mobile high line – unlike the ageing backline exposed by Brazil and France.

#### STRENGTHS

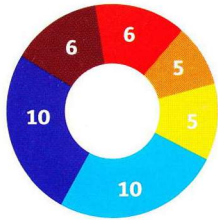
Young Tom Rogic is a blossoming alternative to 'Marco' Bresciano (above) as playmaker. Mark Milligan and Mile Jedinak direct Postecoglou's pressing possession game in midfield while youngsters such as Oar, Mathew Leckie and Rogic can alleviate the burden on Cahill.



# THE 60-SECOND DOSSIER

## RESULTS SINCE LAST WORLD CUP

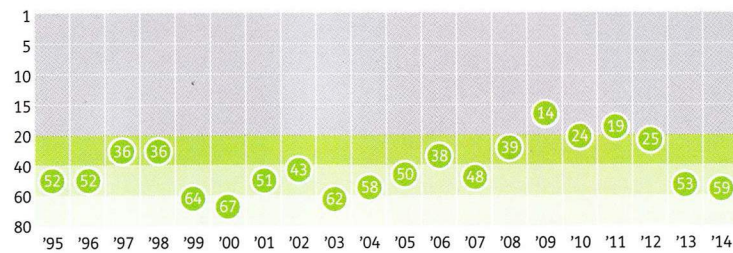
- Won by two or more goals
- Won by one goal
- Score draw
- Goalless draw
- Lost by one goal
- Lost by two or more goals



## SCORERS SINCE LAST WORLD CUP



## 20-YEAR FIFA RANKING



## IN NUMBERS

Stats provided by **opta**

# 25

The Socceroos scored 25 goals in qualifying – only Japan (30) and South Korea (27) scored more

# 31

Tim Cahill heads into the World Cup as the nation's highest goal-scorer – 31 strikes in 67 appearances

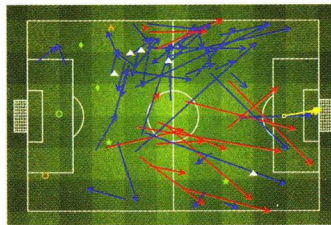
# 100

Lucas Neill could earn his 100th Socceroos cap in the group stage of the World Cup, provided he's selected

## STATS ZONE SAYS:

### Mark Milligan: vs Newcastle Jets

Milligan is the midfield mastermind who can singlehandedly change the fortunes of Melbourne Victory, linking up with the backline and pushing play forwards. Stats show they struggle without him.



## WEAKNESSES

In April, Postecoglou was still "building a new core". Australia's pressing is unrehearsed, their possession untuned. Cutting out crosses to Cahill may shut them down completely and the defence is vulnerable to pace, depending on the squad selected. They'll be missing their star man, too: Bayer Leverkusen winger Robbie Kruse is injured.

## LESSONS FROM QUALIFYING

Late goals – seven minutes from time, when it came to clinching qualification – seem to be a Socceroo trademark. They'll be toughened up by their gruelling qualification campaign, their second as part of the Asian Football Confederation since leaving Oceania.

## VERDICT

Probably bottom, but very capable of springing a huge surprise. With the coach's attitude, fearlessness and the traditional Aussie two fingers to adversity – and with so many unknown factors in the squad and coaching – they may yet pull off the apparently impossible and deny the rest of Group B the three points they inevitably will each expect.

## KEY PLAYER

A talisman for New York Red Bulls, Cahill (left) was undimmed in the friendly against Ecuador at the tip of a 4-2-3-1. He became Australia's all-time top scorer in that game, his two strikes taking him to 31 goals, smashing Damian Mori's long-standing record of 29.



# PLAYER INTERVIEW

## MATT RYAN

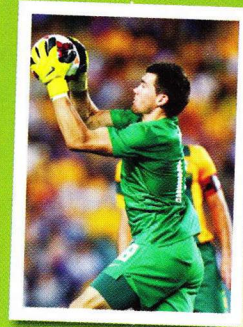
**The recent game against Ecuador was the proverbial game of two halves. What was the feeling straight after?**

We were all disappointed. When we got back to the hotel Ange spoke to us and said what everyone was feeling – we didn't get any reward for the type of football we played. He just wanted us to keep believing in his system. I doubt anyone was questioning that at all, especially that first half. In the second half with the circumstances that unfolded, it's always tough when you go a man down. We're also a fairly new group so it takes time to pull together. But we've made a lot of improvements since Costa Rica. Coming up to the South Africa game, hopefully we can emulate that first half and we'll be more consistent.

**How have you found Ange's style of coaching?**

I've been really enjoying the challenges he's putting to us keepers and what's expected from us. He's not wanting us to fear anyone. He wants us to be courageous and brave. He believes in us. Being Australians, we can match it with some of the best teams in the world, and he really believes that in all

the meetings we've had and all the messages he's giving to the team. We're all learning at the moment and trying to adapt. I feel we're progressing, it's obviously going to be a process and I'm think we're going fairly well at the moment. We want to keep on improving in time for Brazil.



**You came into the**

**Socceroos under Holger Osieck – what changes do you see as the main differences between him and Ange?**

The style of play has changed a lot, being a lot more positive playing out from the back. Ange has that discipline about him, that aura that you know you're going to have to work really hard. Obviously with a new coach coming in, everything restarts for every player. Some coaches will have different opinions. One will like one player, it doesn't necessarily mean the other coach will like that player, so everyone's back on even par. It encourages everyone to start

working hard again and pushing for the position they can hopefully make their own. I think the intensity has been a lot quicker and higher under Ange. He just seems to be getting the best out of everyone at the moment.

