

Canberra United F.C. Tactical Analysis

An in-depth tactical analysis of Canberra United's 2024-25 season using data (provided by [FBREF.com](#)). The analysis is done entirely using data; I have never watched a Canberra United game nor any Women's A-League games, and so all statements about playstyle are based on assumptions made from looking at the data. I will be looking at the strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in the style that Canberra United play with.

Attacking Play

First of all, let us start with the most important statistic in football: goals. Canberra United scored 28 goals (2 of which being own goals, which we will not look at, thus 26) and had an xG of 23.6, meaning they outperformed by 2.4 in terms of goals scored compared to goals expected.

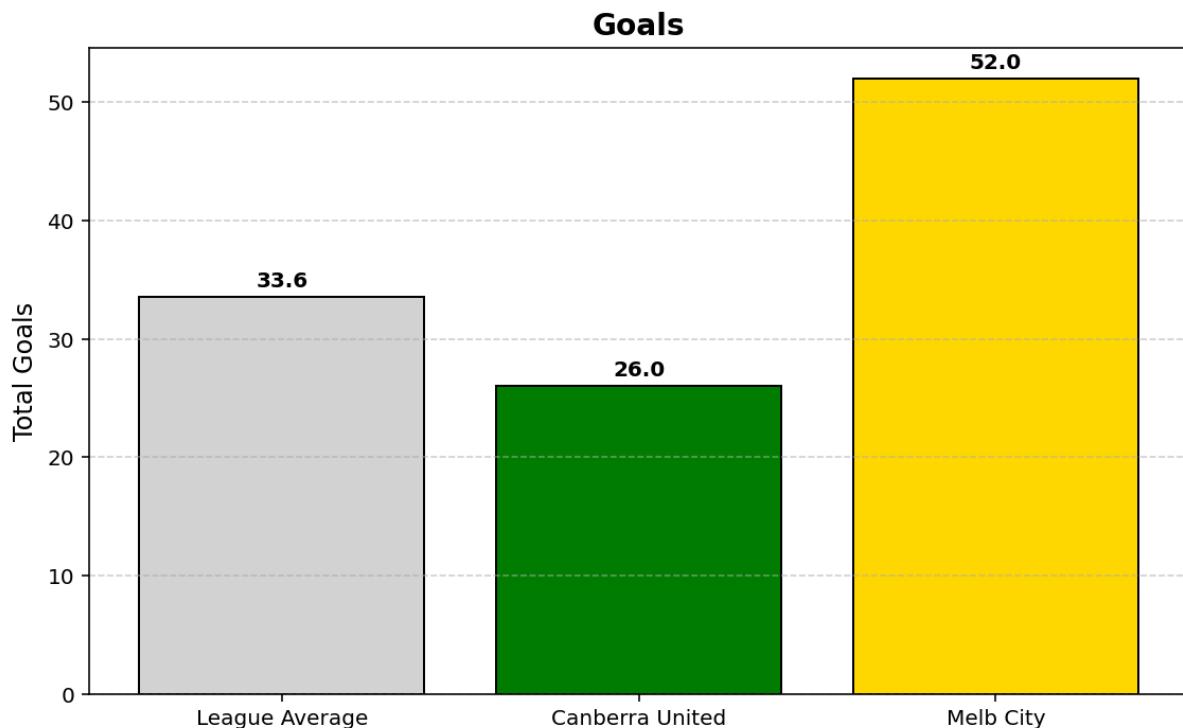


Figure 1: Total Goals in 2024-25, compared to the League average and the most goals in the league, scored by Melbourne City.

We can see immediately by looking at Figure 1 that Canberra United are not a high scoring team, having scored 7.6 fewer goals than the average team in the league, and only half the amount of goals as the highest scoring team, Melbourne City.

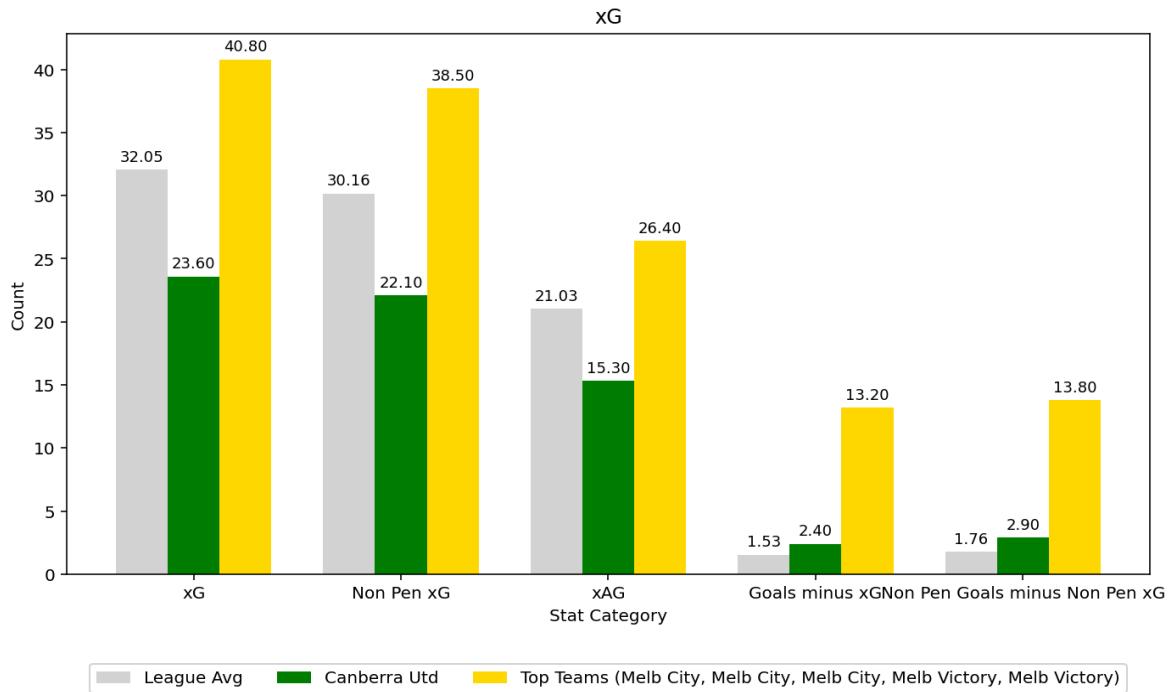


Figure 2: xG and related stats compared to League average and top teams

Taking a look at Figure 2 we can see much of the same as Figure 1; Canberra United have less expected goals and are creating less goals and goal scoring opportunities than the league average, and significantly less than the league leaders. The statistic ‘xAG’ is the expected assisted shots, or the xG that is created from a shot taken assisted by a pass, and since it is 15.30 compared to the average of 21.03, it can be deduced that less goal scoring opportunities are being created by Canberra United than average. However, there is a positive which can be taken here; Canberra United are more prolific with their shots and chances on goal than the average team, shown by the Goals - xG statistic, which means Canberra United are scoring more than they are expected to based on the position of the shots they are taking, and therefore have a better quality of shot finishers than the league average.

It is clear from these first two Figures that Melbourne City and Melbourne Victory are the two teams to aim for in terms of attacking play, which is backed up by the fact they were the top two teams in the league standings in 2024-25. Melbourne City score and create by far the most goals, while Melbourne Victory create less but must have some highly skilled finishers since they have scored so many more goals than they are expected to.

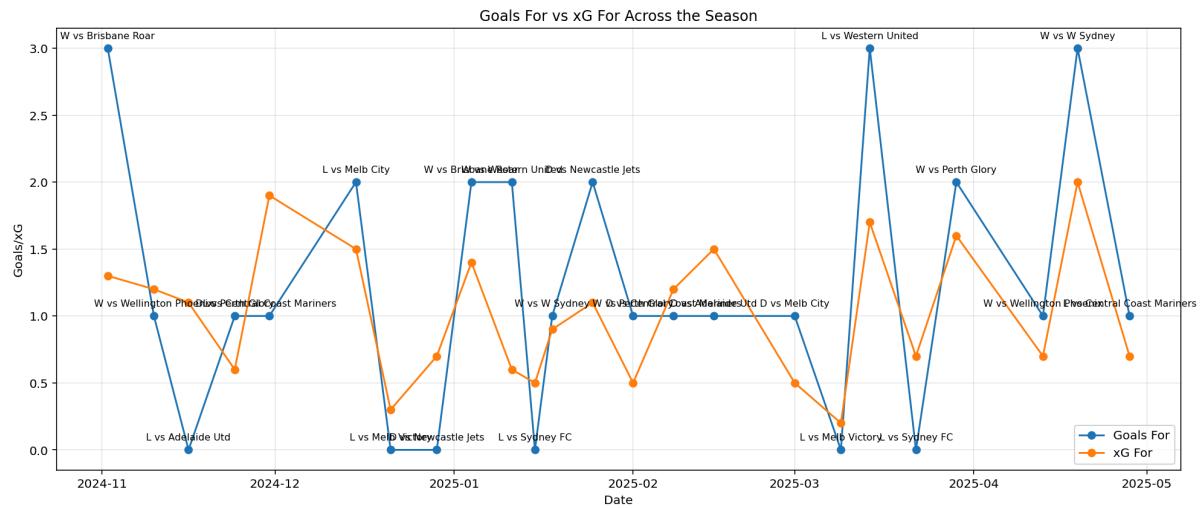


Figure 3: Goals scored compared to xG created by Canberra United throughout each game of the 2024-25 season, accompanied by the result and opponent.

Figure 3 shows us the comparison of Goals and xG for Canberra United in each match in 2024-25. It shows that more often than not Canberra United outperform xG with goals, especially during a win. It is rare that xG outperforms goals by a large margin (+1 xG - Goal) although it did on one occasion: during a loss to Adelaide United, Canberra United scored 0 goals and racked up an xG of 1.1. However, there are multiple occasions of Canberra United outperforming their xG with goals by more than 1 Goal - xG, consolidating the strong finishing ability that Canberra United possess.

Finishing, whilst being a strong suit of Canberra United's, is something I would strongly recommend Canberra United focus more on in training. As mentioned earlier, Melbourne Victory have excellent finishers at the club and are doing very well for it. Since Canberra United are not amongst the top teams in terms of creating opportunities, they must be excellent at finishing the chances they do get in order to win more games, and since it is already something Canberra United do well it is a lot easier to improve upon than chance creation for example.

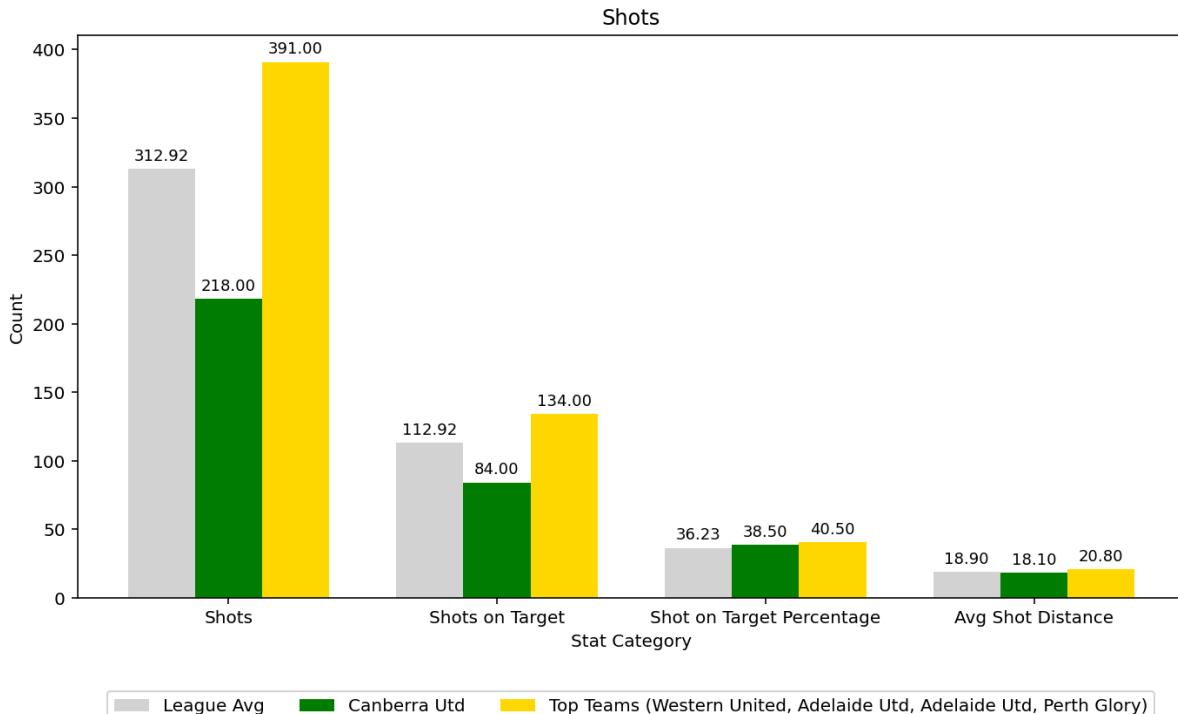


Figure 4: Shots and related statistics compared to League averages and top teams.

Now moving on to shooting, Figure 4 shows the number of shots and the quality of shots that Canberra United have taken. Again, as expected, Canberra United have significantly less shots and therefore less shots on target than the average team. Having almost 100 less shots throughout the season than the average team shows how far off Canberra United are from being amongst the top attacking teams in the Women's A-League. However, correlating with the strong finishing mentioned earlier, Canberra United displayed a strong shot on target percentage. Whilst not taking many shots, the shots they do take are good shots, and only 2% off of the top team, Adelaide United. Also, a positive to take here is the average shot distance that Canberra United have. At 18.1 yards, they are taking shots closer to the goal than the average team at 18.9 yards, and the closer to goal the higher the chance of scoring. There is a way to go however, as they are still a fair bit off of the team with the lowest shot distance, Adelaide United, at 16.7 yards.

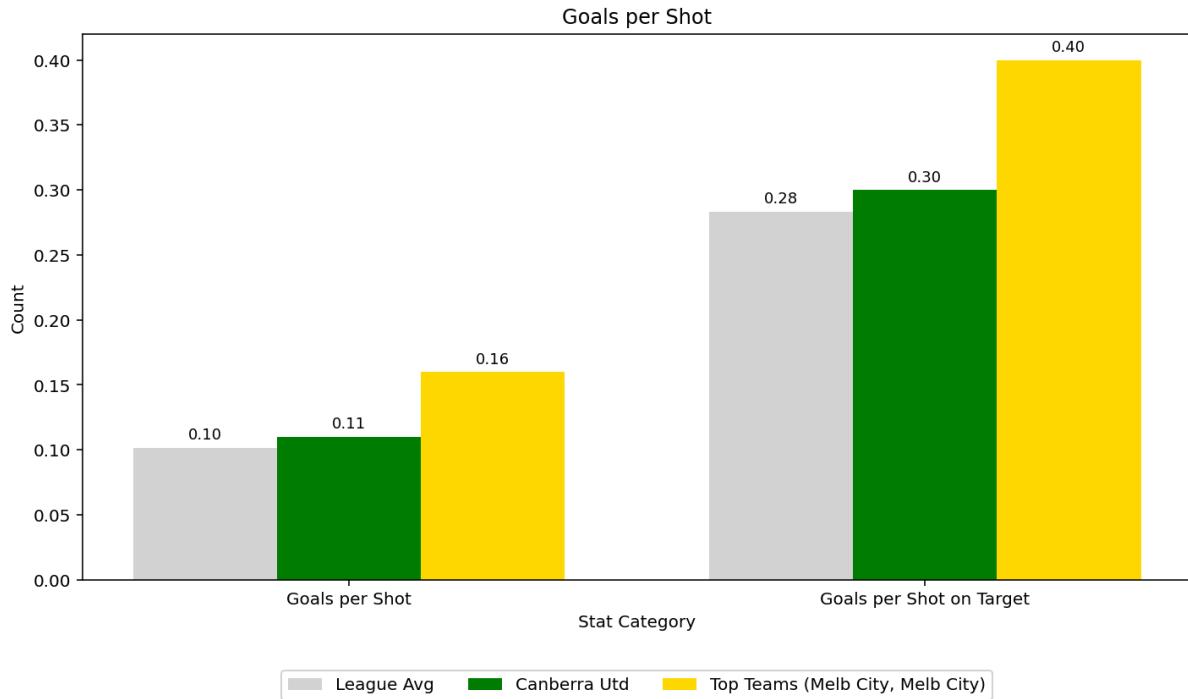


Figure 5: Goals per shot and goals per shot on target compared to League average and top team.

Linking to Figures 2 and 4, Figure 5 displays the above average quality of Canberra United's shots. I say above average though, because it is only slightly above average and is still a way off of the top team, Melbourne City, who have a 0.16 goal per shot ratio compared to Canberra United's 0.11, and a 0.40 goal per shot on target ratio compared to Canberra United's 0.30. Since Canberra United do not take anywhere near the most shots, I believe the shots they do take should be of higher quality and closer to the top teams. As mentioned earlier, finishing should be a top priority for training and improvement in the new 2025-26 season.

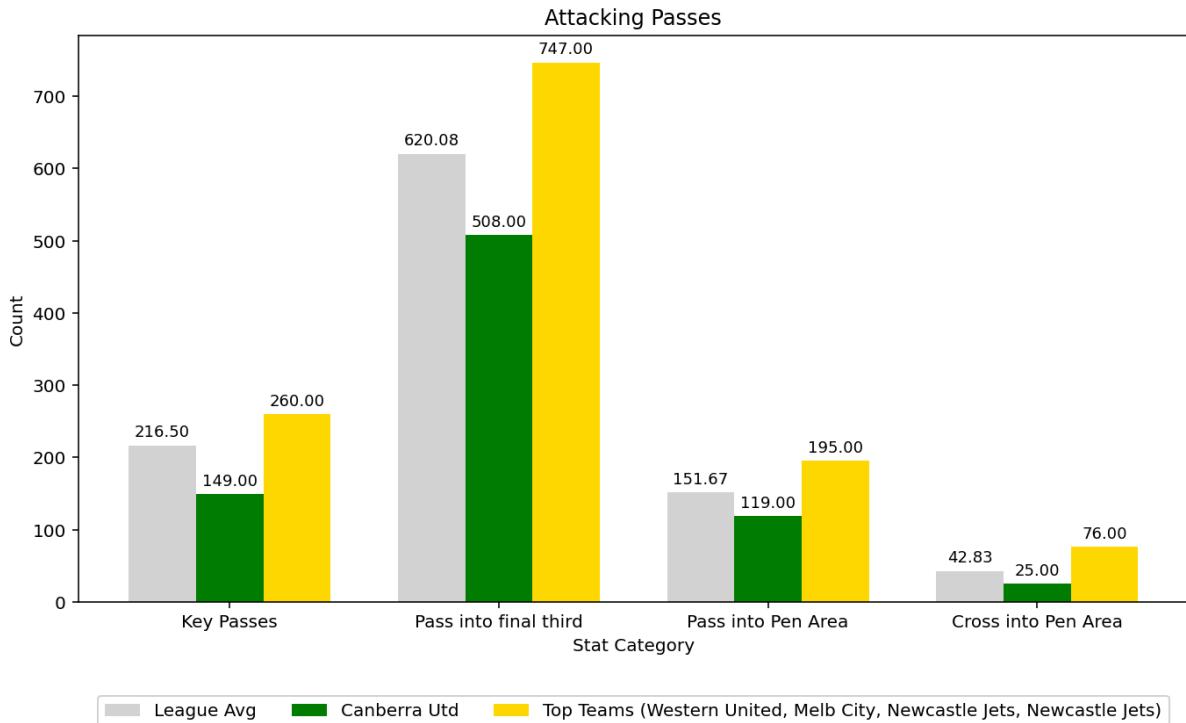


Figure 6: Attacking Passes compared to League average and top teams.

We move to creation and the ‘behind the scenes’ of attacking play: the attacking passes that make the moves. On theme, Figure 6 shows that Canberra United are not a creative team, making a lot less passes into attacking areas of the pitch than average. It is not a necessity to be a creatively attacking team, as many winning teams do not need to pass their way into goal. This is evident as Western United, the team with the most key passes, and Newcastle Jets, the team with the most passes and crosses into the penalty area, both finished below Canberra United at 6th and 11th, respectively. Therefore, this is not a necessity for Canberra United to work on, as creativity and attacking passes are not part of their playstyle. It is something to keep in mind should there be a change in manager or players that shifts towards this type of tactical play, but for the current state of the squad I would suggest that the lack of forward passes is not a major concern.

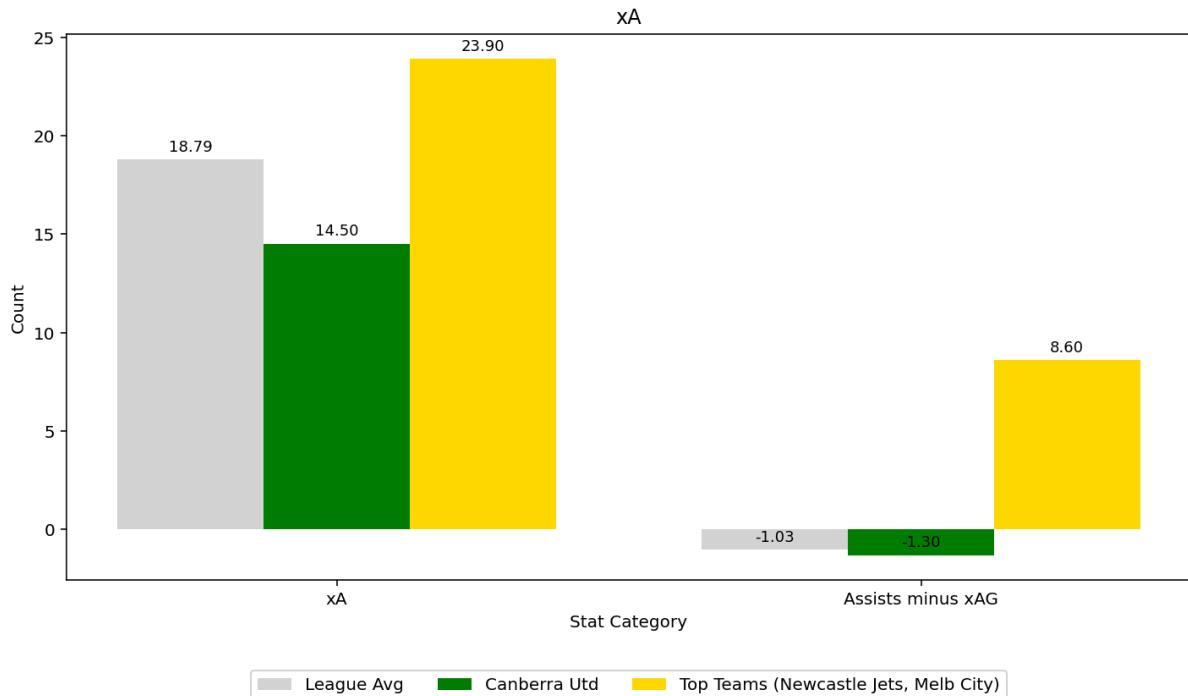


Figure 7: xA compared to League average and top teams.

Figure 7 concerns xA, which is different to the xAG we have seen before. It is specifically based on the expectation of an assist to be made based on the position of where the pass was made, pass type, phase of play, and distance, and not the location where the pass was received and then a subsequent shot taken, which is what xAG is. This shows the lack of creative and attacking passing as Canberra United have a lower than average xA. A slightly more worrying statistic is assists minus xAG, in which Canberra United have -1.30, meaning they are getting less assists (and therefore goals) than expected based on the attacking passes they are making, which as shown earlier, is not many in the first place. This is also lower than the average, so is something Canberra United certainly should work to improve on. This number should be a lot higher if Canberra United want to be the clinical and efficient team that they need to be considering their lack of attacking passes and shots.

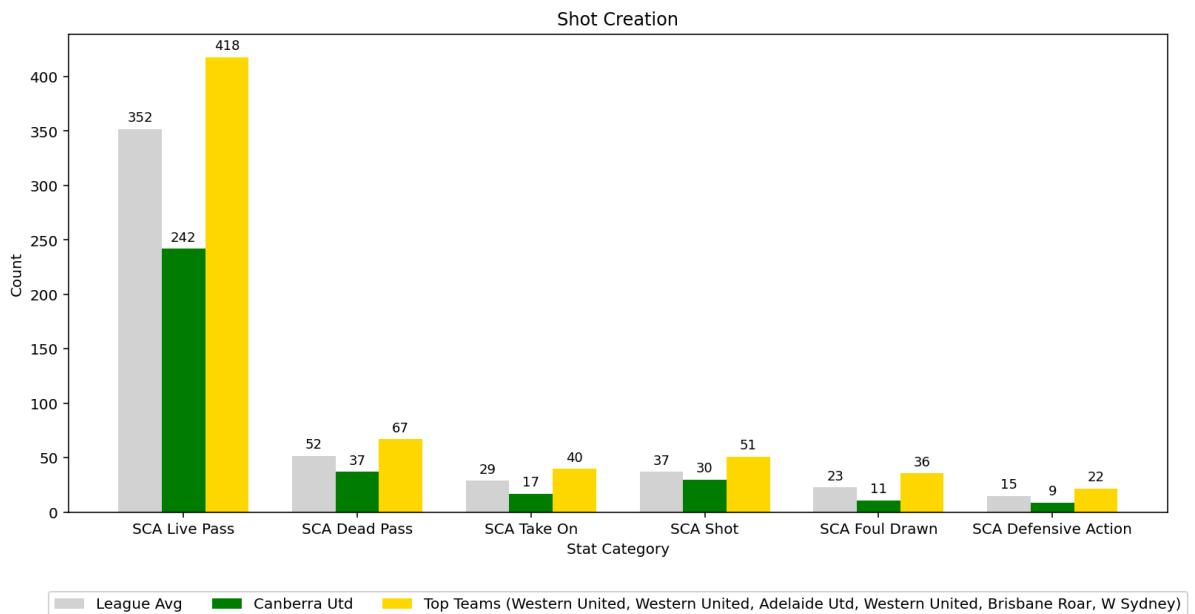


Figure 8: Shot creation statistics compared to League average and top teams

Figure 8 may need some explaining: SCA stands for shot-creating actions, and the different statistics here are what created the action. For example, SCA Shot means a shot that led to another shot attempt, and SCA Defensive Action means a defensive action that directly led to a shot attempt.

It is unsurprising that Canberra United are below average in all shot creating actions, seeing as they take very few shots. In fact, Canberra United rank the lowest for shots, shots on target and almost all shot creating actions. SCA Shot is the only shot creating action that they are not lowest or a close second lowest, meaning Canberra United could put more focus into creating SCA from taking shots. This would mean taking more shots, potentially when in crowded areas meaning the shot can rebound off of a defender, the goalkeeper, or the woodwork to a Canberra United player to take another shot.

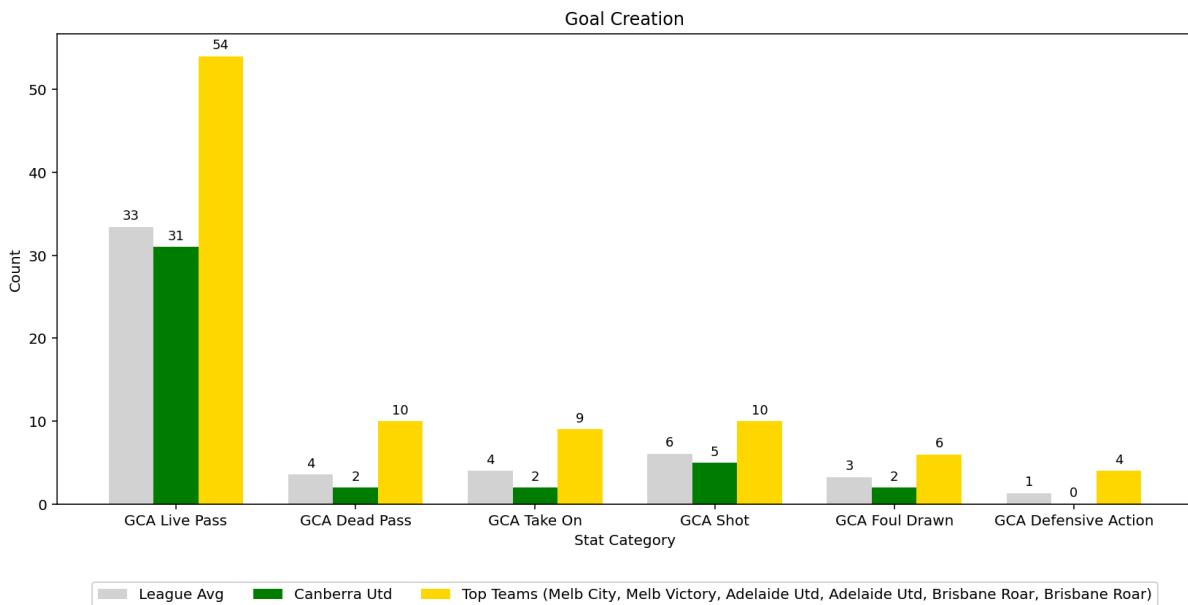


Figure 9: Goal creating actions compared to League average and top teams.

Here in Figure 9 we see a very similar chart as the previous in Figure 8. An almost identical shape, which makes sense as this is goal creating actions, which obviously correlate closely with shot creating actions. The only slight difference is how much closer Canberra United are to the average in terms of goal creating actions coming from a live pass. In fact they are among the top half of teams in terms of GCA Live Pass. As with SCA, Canberra United do better in shots creating GCA than most other stats, with the exception being from live passes which differs from the SCA chart. This means that more effort and focus should be put on SCA and GCA stemming from live passes and shots, as they are already doing well in these areas.

Trying to improve scoring goals from live passes does go without saying really, since it is the most natural way of scoring, but it is encouraging that Canberra United are better than expected at this form of scoring. This means I could suggest trying to improve at something like take ons in and around the box to score more goals, or dead pass, which would be corners and free kicks. It is definitely recommendable for Canberra United to improve their goals from set pieces, as a team that is limited in creative attacking from open play would massively benefit from improving their scoring chances with corners, free kicks and long throws, in a similar vein to the modern Arsenal team. Set pieces are something I would suggest Canberra United spend time working on in training.

Defensive Play

Let us move on to the defensive side of Canberra United's play. This is something that I personally would expect to be a stronger part of their play, seeing as we have already established that they are not a strong attacking or creative team. A promising start is that they do concede less goals and xG than the average in the League. They conceded 31 goals (3 of which being own goals, which we will not focus on right now, so 28 conceded), and

conceded an xG of 30.0, and so also outperformed by 2.0 in terms of goals conceded compared to expected goals conceded. In fact, they have the 4th lowest xG conceded, so they are definitely doing well at stopping teams from creating goal-scoring opportunities. They do concede slightly more than they score though, meaning they attack worse than they defend well, or that the defending has room for improvement. I would suggest for a team that does not have loads going forward, the defensive work should be amongst the best teams, if not the best, to counteract the lack of offence.

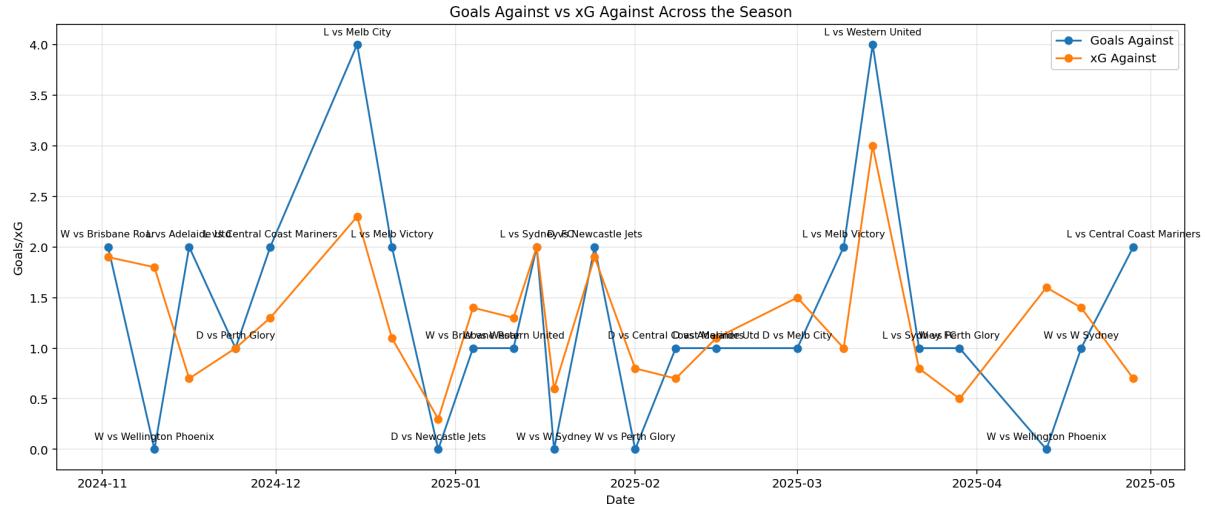


Figure 10: Goals vs xG conceded throughout the season with the result and opponents.

In Figure 10 we can see the trend of goals and xG conceded as the season goes along. For the most part the xG follows the goals quite similarly, with a few main outliers in terms of goals outperforming xG all being losses. Two to Melbourne City and Western United, where 4 goals were conceded, and two where 2 goals were conceded, one to Adelaide United and the other to Central Coast Mariners. There are also a couple of occasions where the xG massively outperforms the goals conceded, which is a positive, mainly for the goalkeeper, since the shots were allowed to be taken meaning the defending wasn't up to par. These two occasions were both victories against Wellington Phoenix.

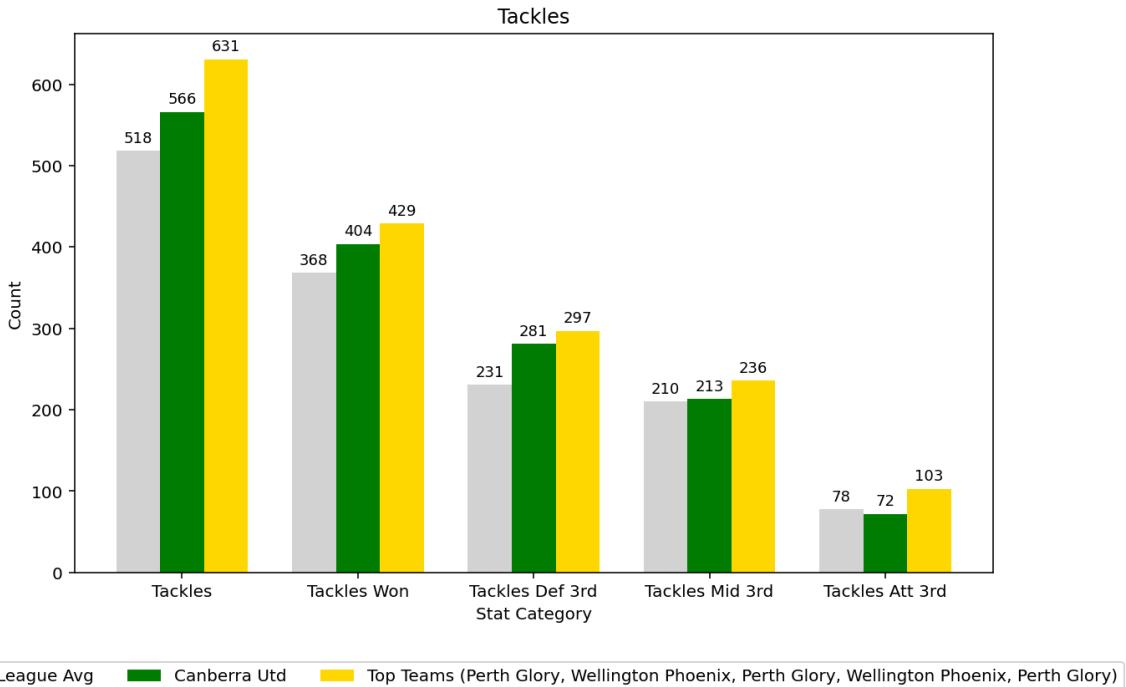


Figure 11: Tackles compared to League average and top teams.

Here we see reinforced proof of Canberra United's strong defensive capabilities. In Figure 11 we can see the number of tackles in each area of the pitch as well as the tackles being won. They are strong in terms of tackling, especially the defenders, as we can see from the tackles in the defensive third. Canberra United have many more tackles in the defensive third than the league average and are not far away from having the most.

We can also see that the tackles in each third of the pitch decrease from well above average to below average from the defensive third towards the attacking third. This implies that Canberra United are not a high-pressing team that wins the ball high up the pitch to create attacking opportunities, which ties in with Figures 8 & 9 that show the SCA and GCA from defensive actions is well below average.

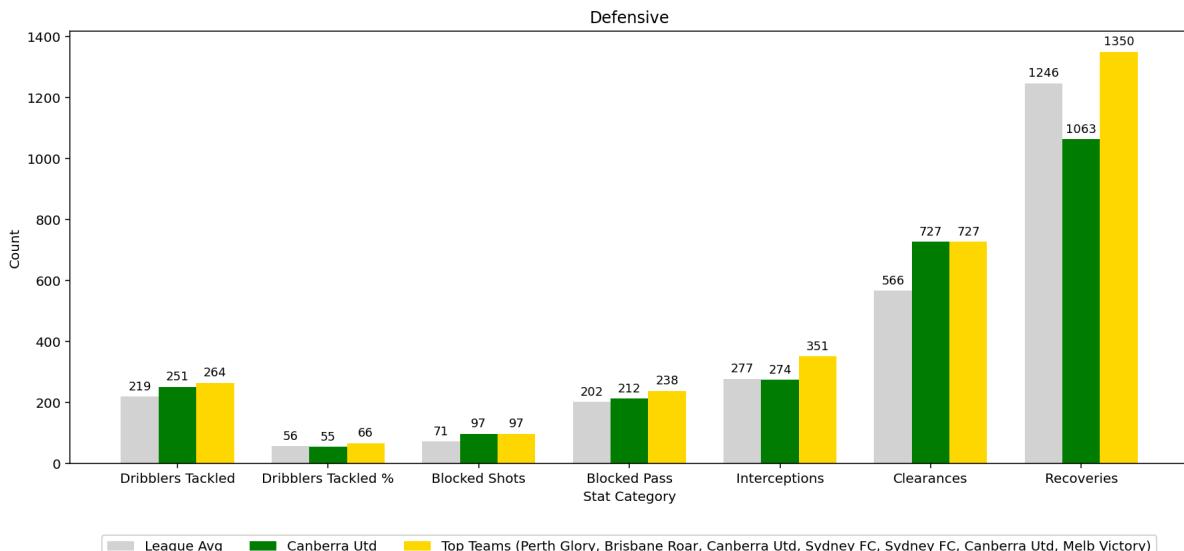


Figure 12: Defensive stats compared to League average and top teams.

What we see in Figure 12 is very promising. Canberra United showed very strong defensive abilities, being the best in the league with blocked shots and clearances, and being above average in dribblers tackled and blocked passes. The team clearly has a good defensive shape, and I assume manage to get a lot of players behind the ball when defending. They do a very good job of defending the goal, as is shown by blocked shots.

The clearances being so high can be read into as good and potentially worrying, however. Of course it is a good thing to be able to clear the ball from danger, so to do it a lot is positive.

The negative side is that in order to have so many clearances it most likely means that a lot of the clearances made go straight back to the opposition who can then have another attempt at attack, which Canberra United can then clear again. In order to turn the high number of clearances into an opportunity for good, Canberra United could keep at least one player higher up the pitch, ideally a player with either a lot of pace or good hold-up play, who can effectively turn a clearance into a counterattacking chance. The team would need to be very quick in transition, and be able to move out of their defensive shape into an attacking formation as quickly as possible to take advantage of the clearance.

Recoveries (the number of loose balls retrieved) could use some work, but this is not an overly important statistic that concerns defensive play.

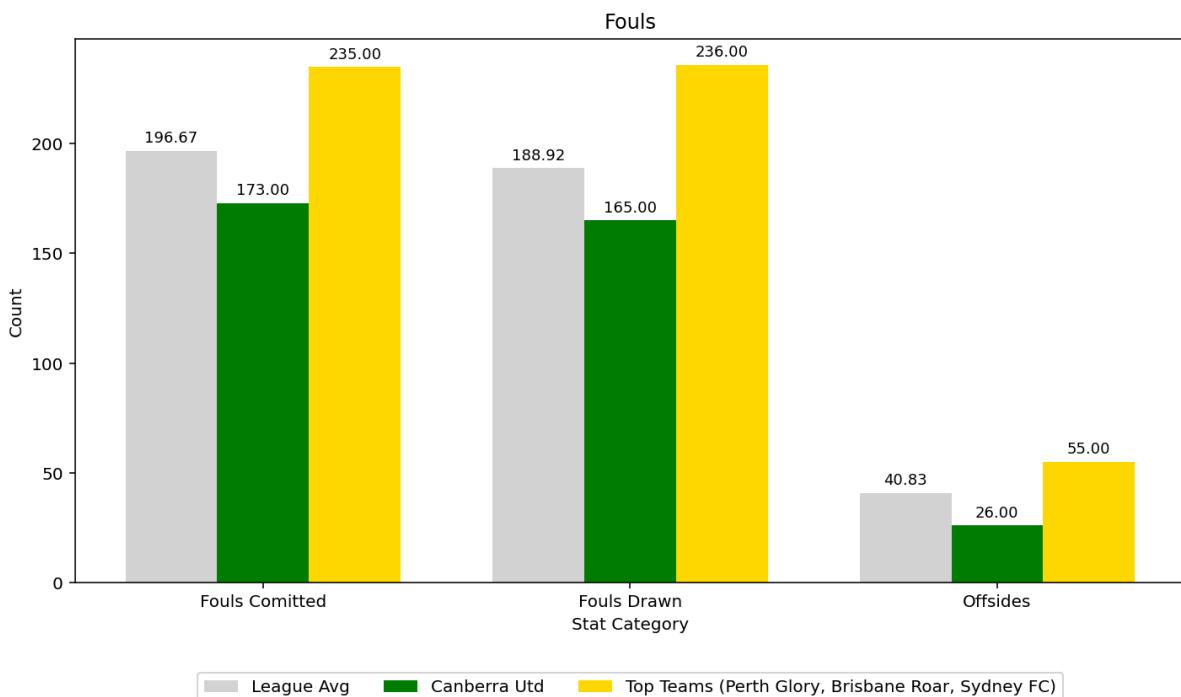


Figure 13: Fouls compared to League average and top teams.

In Figure 13 we see yet more positive reinforcement of Canberra United's defensive play. The fouls committed for a team who is defensive and makes a lot of tackles would be expected to be higher than average, mainly because many tackles tend to be given as fouls, but Canberra United have much less fouls committed than average, and so it can be implied that their players are good tacklers as they make a lot of clean tackles. It is expected that fouls drawn and offsides would also be below average as these are more attacking stats, and Canberra United are a less attacking team, as previously established.

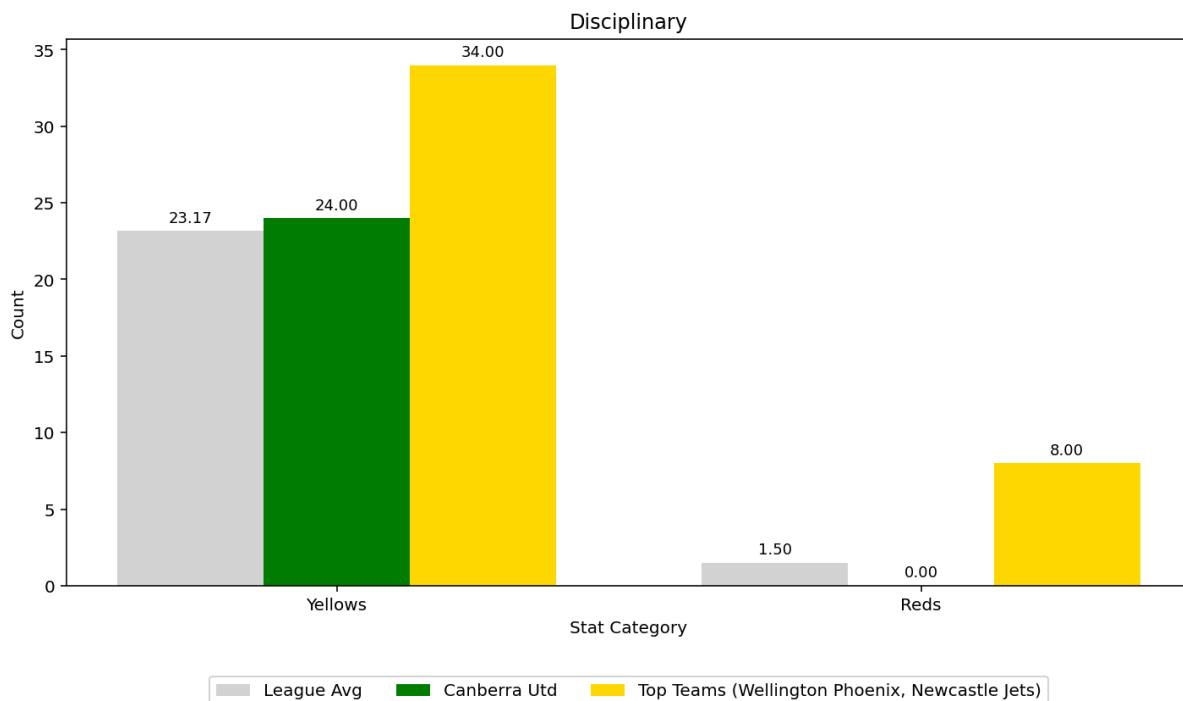


Figure 14: Disciplinary statistics compared to League average and top teams.

Figure 14 shows something similar to Figure 13 in that Canberra United have a lot less disciplinary issues than expected for a defensive team. Often similar teams would pick up many yellow cards since they spend a lot of time out of possession, making challenges, and growing in frustration. Canberra United are only slightly above average in terms of yellow cards, and did not pick up a single red card all season. This is very positive and should be kept this way, potentially improving by receiving less yellow cards, but it is something to be happy with as is.

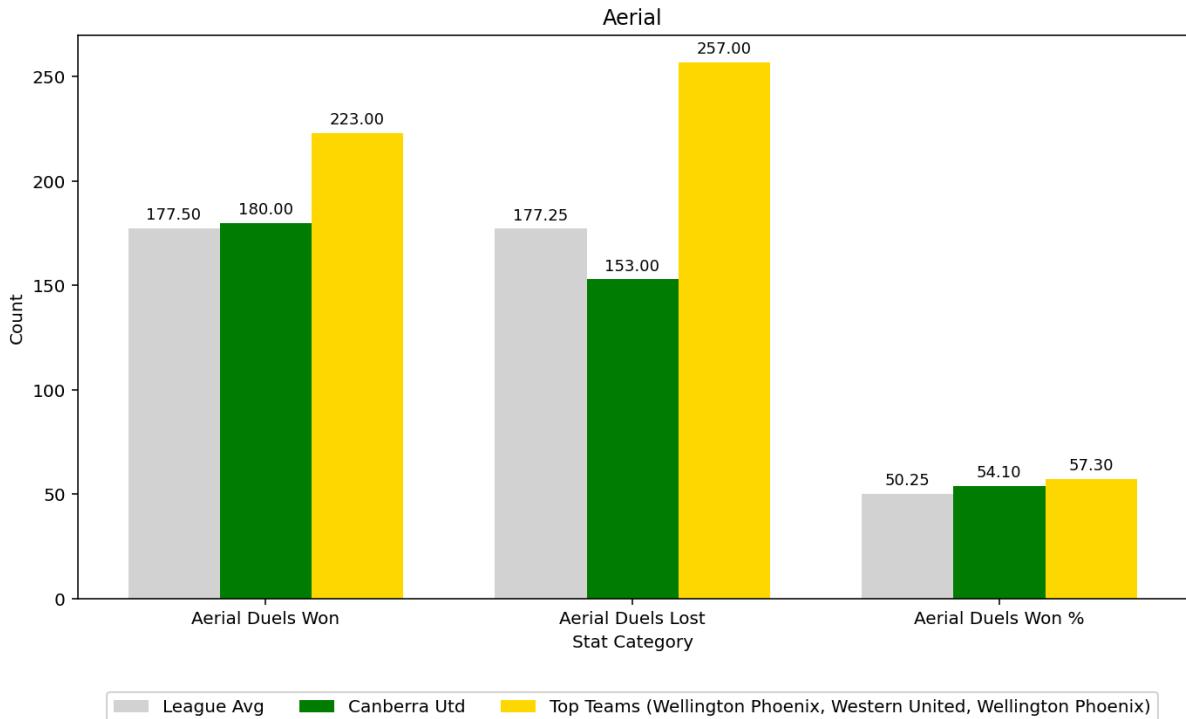


Figure 15: Aerial duels compared to League average and top teams.

Yet again, we have more positive defensive showing in Figure 15. Canberra United not only challenged for more aerial duels than average, but they won a lot more of their duels than average as well. This implies Canberra United have a lot of physicality in terms of height and strength in their team, which is a good sign for a defensive side. This is certainly something that should be kept up, and on top of that, is something that should really be utilised more than it is.

As mentioned earlier, I believe that Canberra United should make more of an effort to score from set pieces, and this only strengthens that belief. Since their players are so good at winning aerial duels, it could be assumed that goals from corners and free kicks crossed into the box would be the best opportunity for Canberra United to score. Since the aerial duels do not necessarily need work, I would suggest working on delivery, and creating a few routines for the players attacking the ball in the box to effectively get away from their markers. Also, moving the ball up the pitch into areas where fouls can be drawn or shots can be made that will be put out for a corner is a wise idea. This does not necessarily require strong attacking play, since the main aim is not to pass or dribble the ball into the box and score, but just to get the ball into an area where a player can be fouled and shots can be taken, thus is certainly doable for Canberra United.

In Possession Play

Canberra United have an average possession of 44%, the lowest of all teams in the Women's A-League. They are not a team that controls games with their own possession and passing, but let us take a look at how they use their time on the ball.

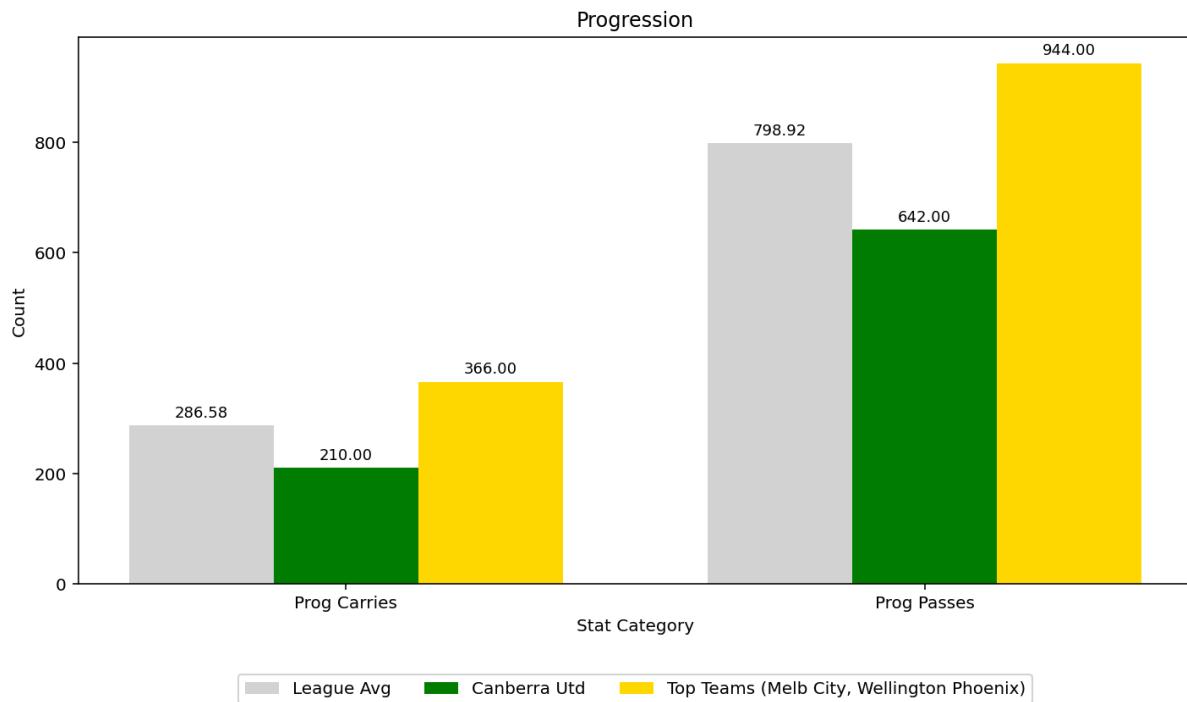


Figure 16: Progressive stats compared to League average and top teams.

Figure 16 shows us what we may have already assumed, namely that forward progression is not something Canberra United do as well, or at least as often, as the rest of the league. They have the lowest progressive carries and the second lowest progressive passes in the league.

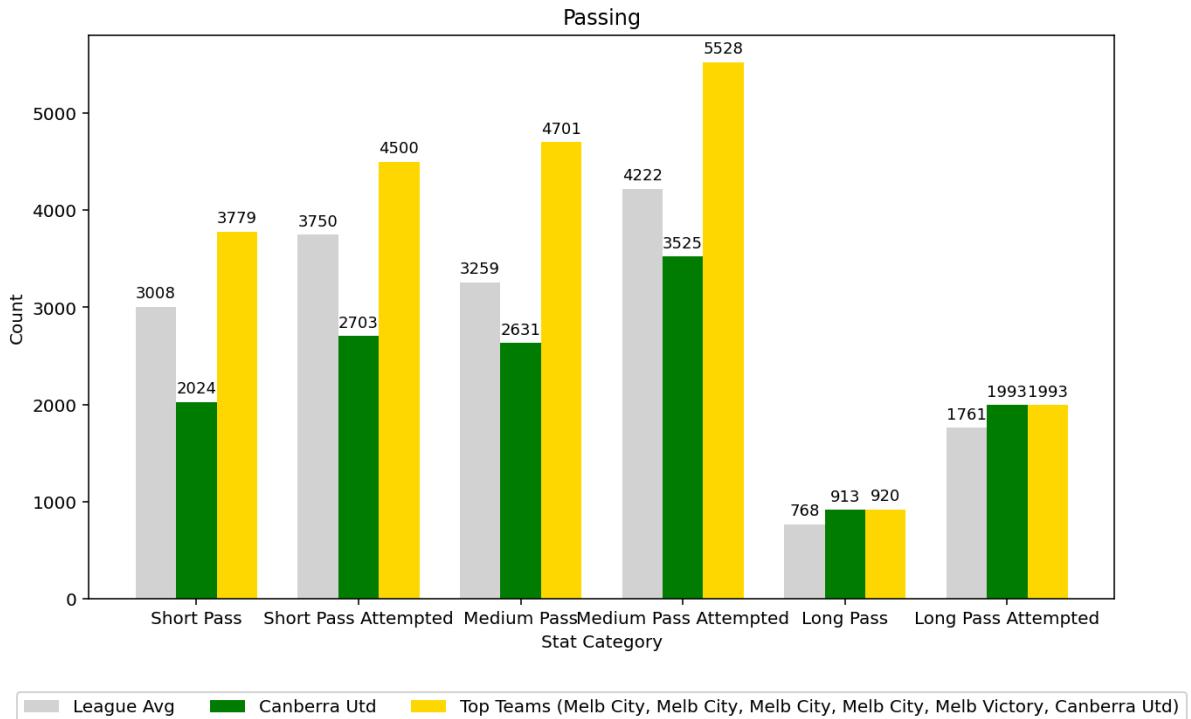


Figure 17: Passing stats compared to League average and top teams.

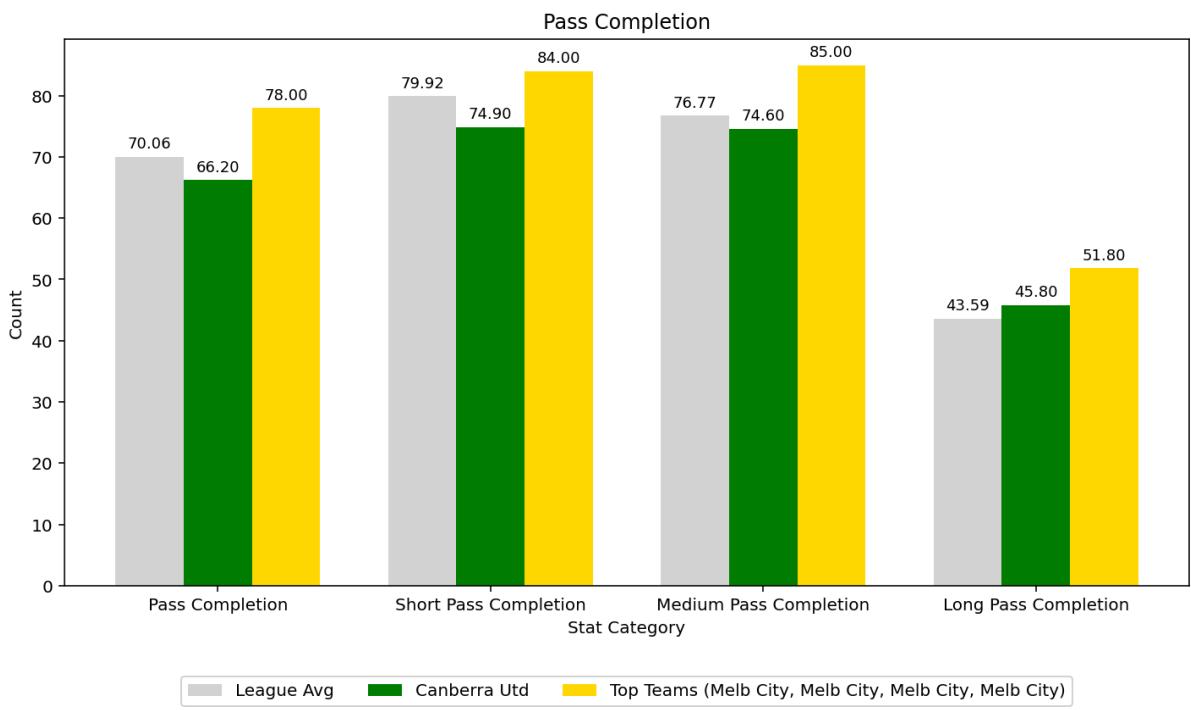


Figure 18: Pass completion stats compared to League average and top teams.

Here we have Figures 17 & 18, which look at the short, medium and long passing numbers and percentage completion. The short and medium pass completion are lower than the league average and should be improved, especially because Canberra United are making significantly less short and medium passes than the rest of the league. If they are not going to attempt many passes, it should be ensured that the passes that are attempted are accurate.

The interesting part of these two figures is the long passing numbers. Canberra United completed the second most long passes and attempted the most long passes, with percentage completion of an above average 45.8%. This is one of the big indicators into Canberra United's playstyle, as it seems as though they like to launch long passes forwards in order to move themselves up the pitch. I would recommend that all forms of passing are worked on to improve accuracy, especially long passing. Short passing needs the most improvement as Canberra United have the lowest short pass completion, but their long passing should be the most accurate in the league as they are the team that relies on long passing more than any other. Melbourne City have the monopoly on passing in the league, and while they make the fewest long passes in the league, they are still the most accurate, which Canberra United must strive towards.

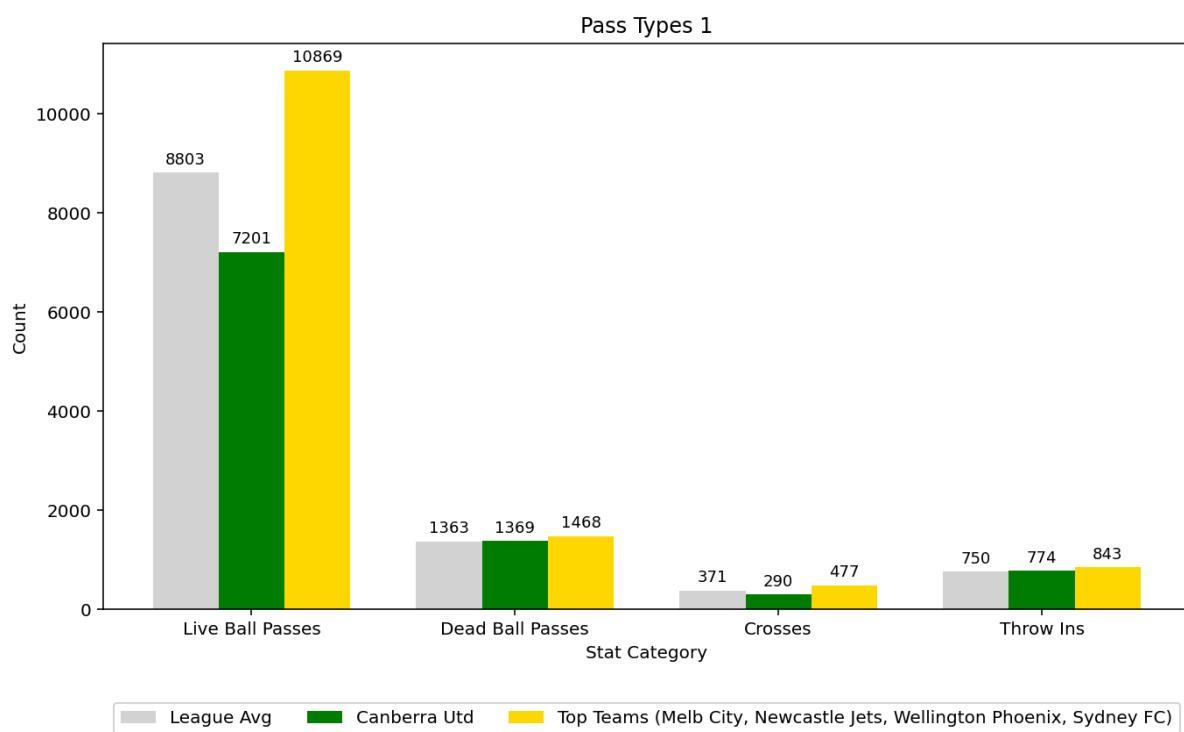


Figure 19: Pass types stats compared to League average and top teams.

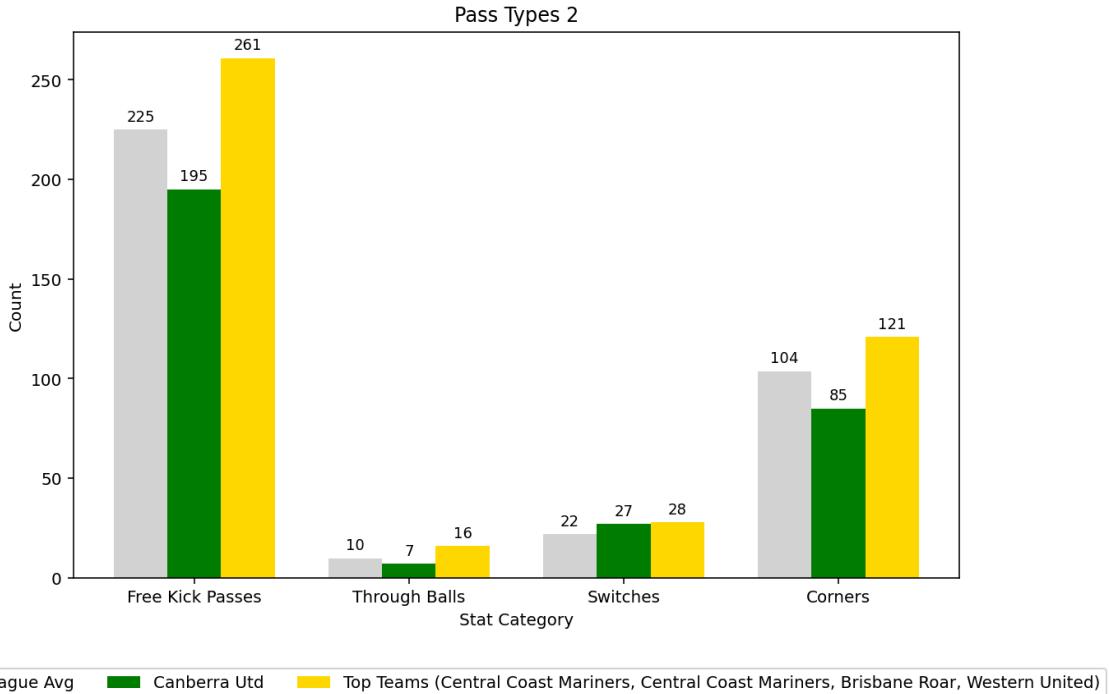


Figure 20: Pass types stats compared to League average and top teams.

Now in Figures 19 & 20, we see the different types of passes that are being made. It makes sense that live ball passes are low, but it is a surprise that dead ball passes are higher than average. Since we can see in Figure 20 that free kick passes and corner passes are below average this most likely means that Canberra United take a lot of goal kicks, which we shall touch on later. It is good to see that throw-ins are above average, as I mentioned earlier how I believe long throw-ins could be key to Canberra United scoring many more goals. Since a lot of throw-ins are being taken, long throws are now something that should be worked on in training to improve upon.

The low number of free kick passes and corners is disheartening, however. These figures must be higher in order to take advantage of the aerial superiority in Canberra United's team. These are both the 3rd lowest in the League which needs to be higher. Seeing as Canberra United finished 5th place and had an overall decent season, if set piece goals had been higher this could have been an outstanding season.

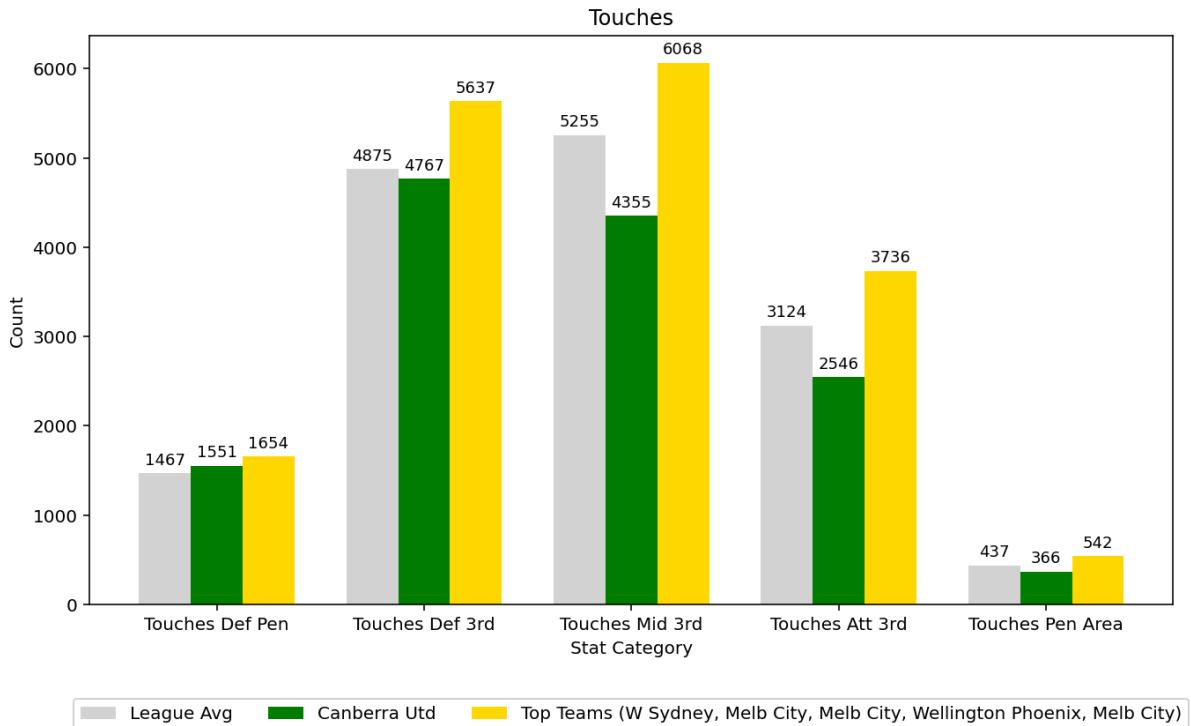


Figure 21: Touches compared to League average and top teams.

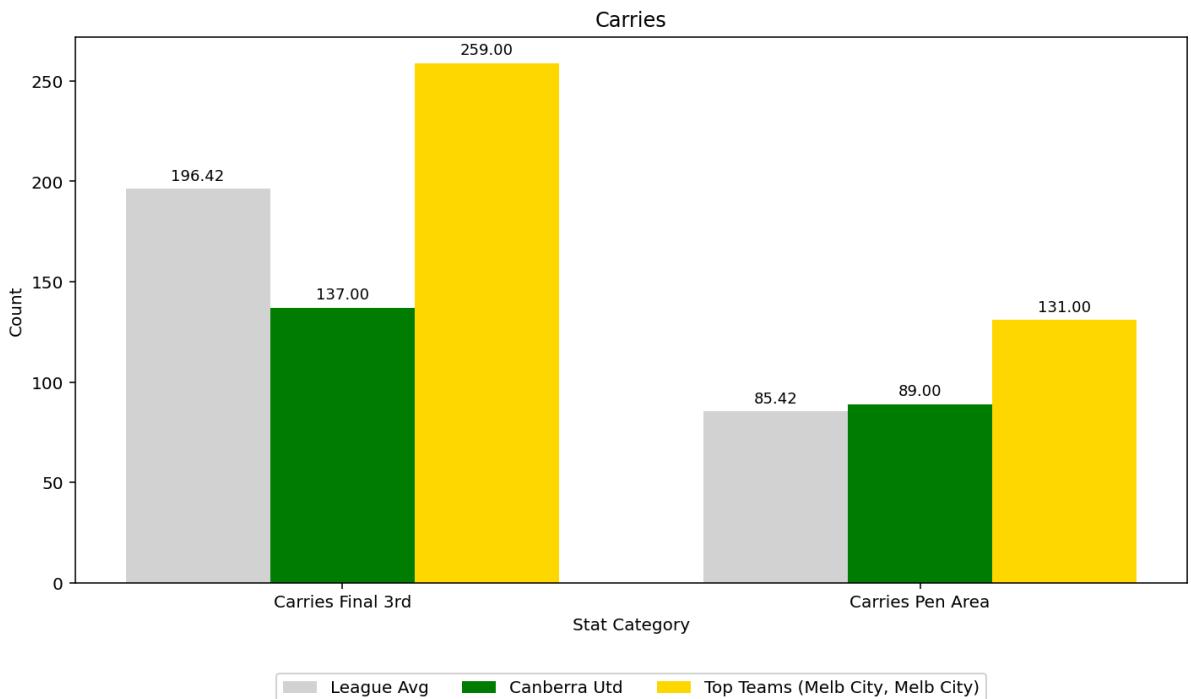


Figure 22: Carries compared to League average and top teams.

In Figure 21 we can see where Canberra United tend to spend their time with the ball. It would be expected for the majority of the time to be spent in the midfield third, although Canberra United actually spend more time in possession in the defensive third. This shows the defensive style of the team, as the average team in the league has most of their touches in the midfield third. We can also see that the only area of the pitch that Canberra United have

above average touches is their own penalty area, which even further reinforces their defensive nature.

It is encouraging to see that the touches in the opponents penalty area are less below average than those of the midfield third and attacking third. While it would be nice to see Canberra United have more touches in the opposition penalty area than other teams, it is not expected because of their lack of attacking play. That being said, they have a higher rate of touches in the penalty area compared to the attacking third than many other teams. In fact, they have the 5th highest rate of touches in the penalty area compared to touches in the attacking third at 12.6%, so this is certainly a positive and something that should be capitalised upon. Canberra United clearly have quality attacking players who can move the ball into threatening areas and so with better links from defence into midfield, and then midfield into attack, there could be a lot more chances created in and around the penalty area. This is reinforced by Figure 22 which shows Canberra United's above average carries into the penalty area, compared to their below average carries into the final third. Canberra United actually have the highest rate of carries into the penalty area compared to carries into the final third, at 65%. When compared to the league average of 44.2%, this makes it an even more impressive number.

I do think it is disappointing how little is being made of this high rate of entering the penalty area, however. Seeing as Canberra United are entering the penalty area 65% of the time they enter the final third, but only 12.6% of their touches in the final third are those inside the penalty area, meaning they are getting into the penalty area and then being dispossessed or tackled most of the time they get into the penalty box.

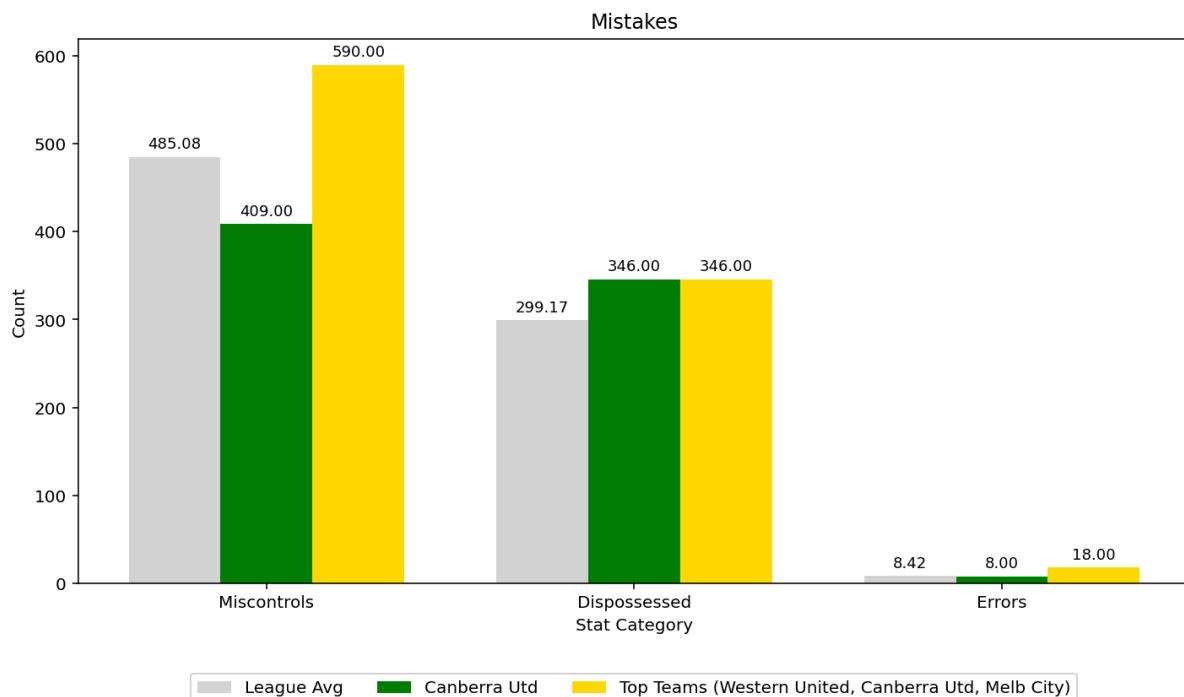


Figure 23: Mistakes compared to League average and top teams.

Here, in Figure 23, we can see where the issue lies when Canberra United are making it into the penalty area. They are the most dispossessed team in the League, so many times when they do have possession they are giving it away to the opposition. This is an issue that needs

addressing should Canberra United want to establish themselves as a top team, because they are wasting many of the chances they are making by allowing themselves to lose possession. It is certainly a positive that Canberra United have much less miscontrols than the average teams in the league, as this is a needless mistake to make and one that can cost possession or even a strong attack just with a simple drop in focus. They actually have the lowest number of miscontrols in the league, which is a huge positive and something that should definitely be kept up.

I believe there is room for improvement in the midfield. I have not spent so much time focusing on the midfield, but the ball tends to spend a lot of time in Canberra's defensive third and defensive penalty area, with passes rarely going through the midfield third into the attacking third. Often the goalkeeper will launch it past the midfield straight into attack, bypassing the midfield altogether. If the midfield are picking it up from these launches they should focus on moving the ball forward to the attackers as well as they can. By looking at Figure 21, we can see the touches in midfield are well below the average, and when most teams have more possession in midfield, Canberra United tend to keep their possession in the defensive third. Figures 6, 16 and 22 show the lack of progression and attacking passes, which is mainly the job of midfield players , and the lack of movement into the final third of the pitch. Moving the ball forward, especially into the final third of the pitch, is the job of midfield players who then should move it on to attacking players. Figure 22 shows the attacking players are doing their job by moving the ball into the penalty area once they have received it from the midfield players, but the midfield are not moving the ball forward enough for Canberra United to have enough attacks on goal. Figures 17 and 18 show the poor standard of short and medium passes (between 5 - 15 yards, and between 15 - 30 yards), most of which will be played by the midfield. This certainly needs to improve, as Canberra United have the lowest possession in the league, and giving the ball away cheaply by having low short and medium pass completion is not good enough for a team wanting to finish higher than 5th in future.

I also think that the midfield do not offer enough protection for the defence, as Figure 11 suggests, tackles in the midfield third are not as high above average as tackles in the defensive third, meaning the opposition are getting through into the defensive third too often, therefore being able to have better chances at an attack. This could be explained by Canberra United system of having a low defensive block, meaning a lot of the time the midfield are in the defensive third when out of possession, but regardless it would be good for either attacking players or more forward midfield to win the ball back more in the midfield third to help protect the defence and create counterattacking opportunities. Figure 12 shows that the interceptions are a poor part of Canberra United's defensive stats. This is something that the midfield, specifically defensive midfield players, should be focusing on and improving, as intercepting the ball in midfield not only protects the defence well, but creates more attacking opportunities than almost any other defensive action, as the opposition have just played a pass and therefore are not prepared for possession to be overturned and cannot quickly move into a defensive shape.

Goalkeeping

Now let us move on to goalkeeping. The keeper is a big part of any team, but is massive for the tactical style of Canberra United. Of course a goalkeeper has to be good at shotstopping and have a strong command of their box, but in the modern game the goalkeeper is the start of play, especially for Canberra United's style which utilises a lot of long balls, which will often come from the keeper. Also, a positive straight off the bat is the 100% penalty save record that Canberra United has. Although they have only faced 1 penalty, it is still something to be happy about.

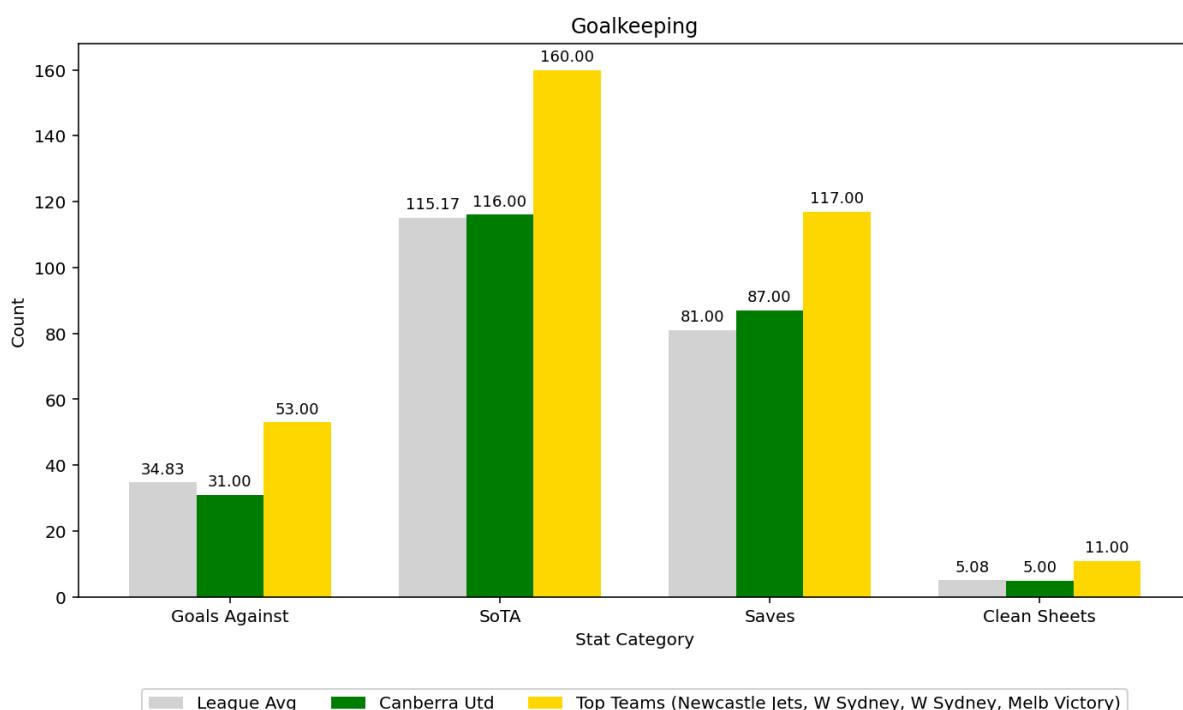


Figure 24: Goalkeeping stats compared to League average and top teams.

Figure 24 shows strong goalkeeping abilities straight away. Canberra United are conceding less goals than the average of the league, although this is not necessarily the goalkeeper's doing as the defence plays a big part in goals conceded. However, SoTA (shots on target against) and saves are entirely based on goalkeeping ability and both are above average, which is a big positive. Western Sydney clearly have a very good goalkeeper or goalkeeping team, and it should be the next goal for the Canberra United goalkeeper(s) to get closer to that level.

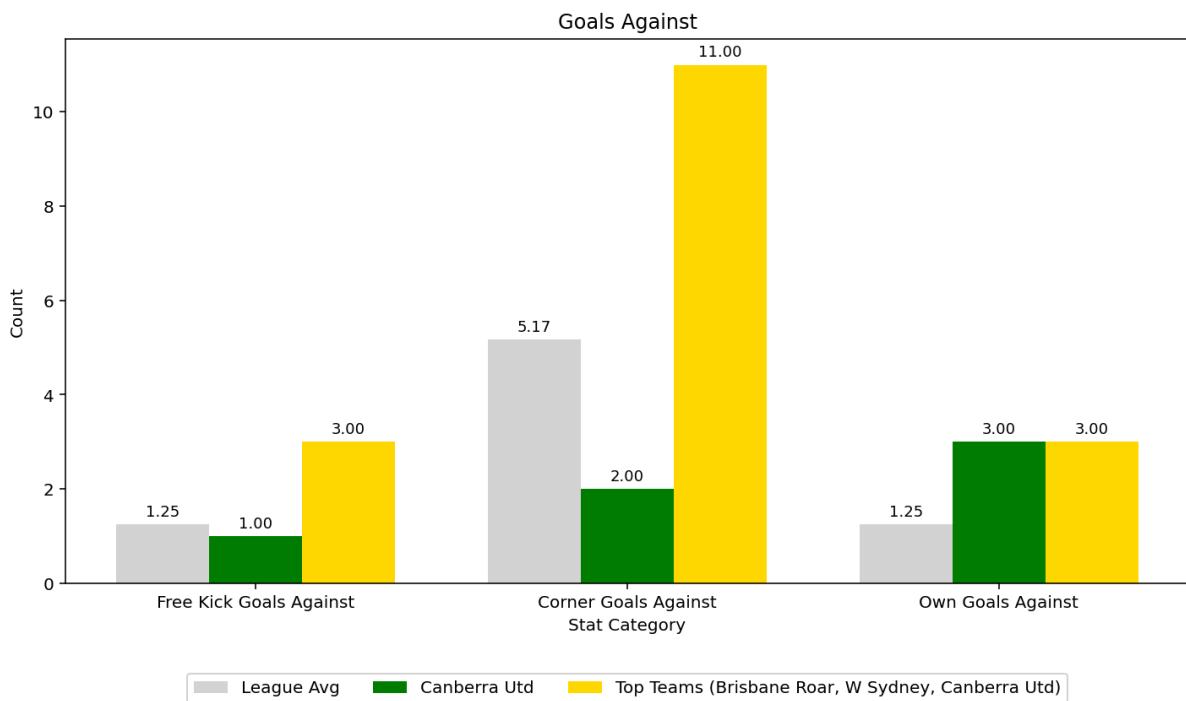


Figure 25: Types of goals against compared to League average and top teams.

In Figure 25 we can see how good the defence and goalkeeper command their penalty area in terms of corners. 2 goals conceded from corners when the average is 5 and the highest is 11 is very impressive. This is the joint fewest corner goals conceded, so is certainly something to be proud of. Also, take note of the 11 goals conceded by Western Sydney, this is clearly a weak point of theirs and should be taken advantage of in games against them.

What is slightly worrying is the number of own goals conceded at 3, which is the highest. Sometimes it cannot be avoided of course, but it is a number that should be cut down, especially because own goals are often errors that are unnecessary.

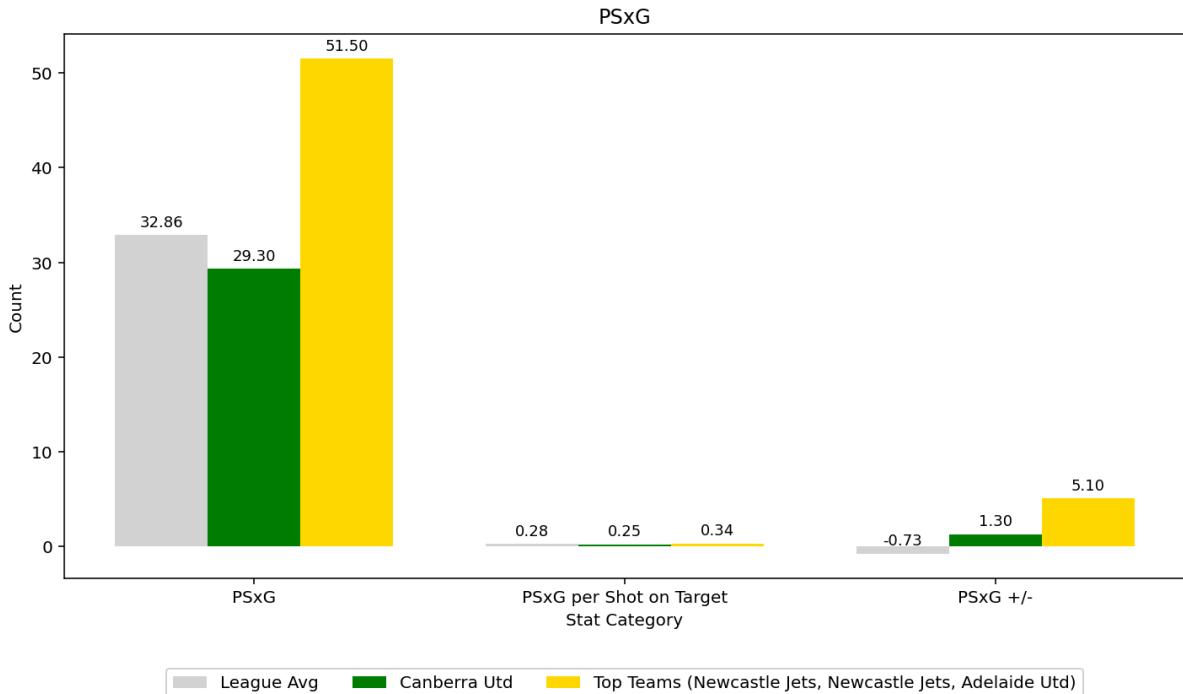


Figure 26: PSxG compared to League average and top teams.

Figure 26 shows us the PSxG(post-shot xG), which means the likelihood of a goalkeeper saving the shot. This shows that Canberra United are conceding less chances than the rest of the league, since the expected goals are lower. The PSxG per shot on target is also slightly lower than average, meaning Canberra United face a lower quality of shots than the rest of the league. These both indicate a strength in defence rather than a strength in goalkeeping, as defenders put the forwards off of their shots or do not allow them into as good shooting positions so their shots on target have less xG.

However, what does show the quality of the Canberra United goalkeeping is the PSxG +/-, which is +1.3, meaning the goalkeeper saved 1.3 goals from going in, compared to the league average of -0.73, meaning the average team concedes more goals than they should. Adelaide United's keeper has stopped 5.1 goals from going in, which should be the next aim for the goalkeeper(s) of Canberra United.

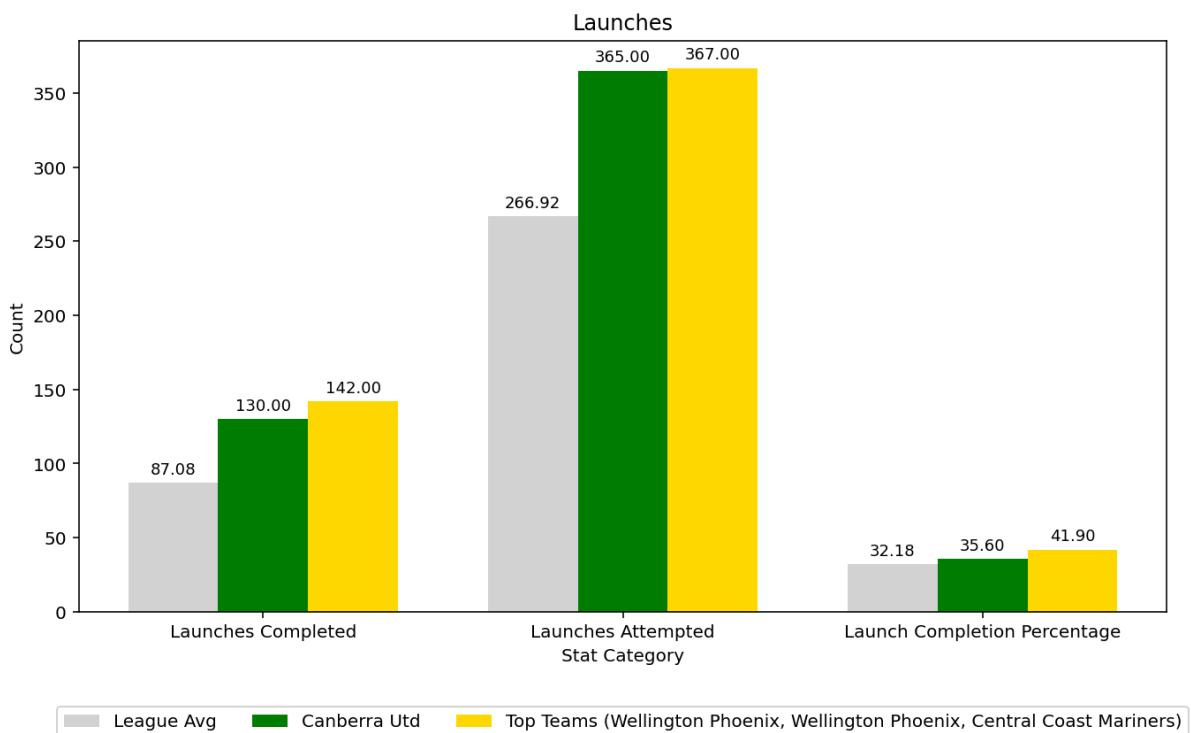


Figure 27: Launches compared to League average and top teams.

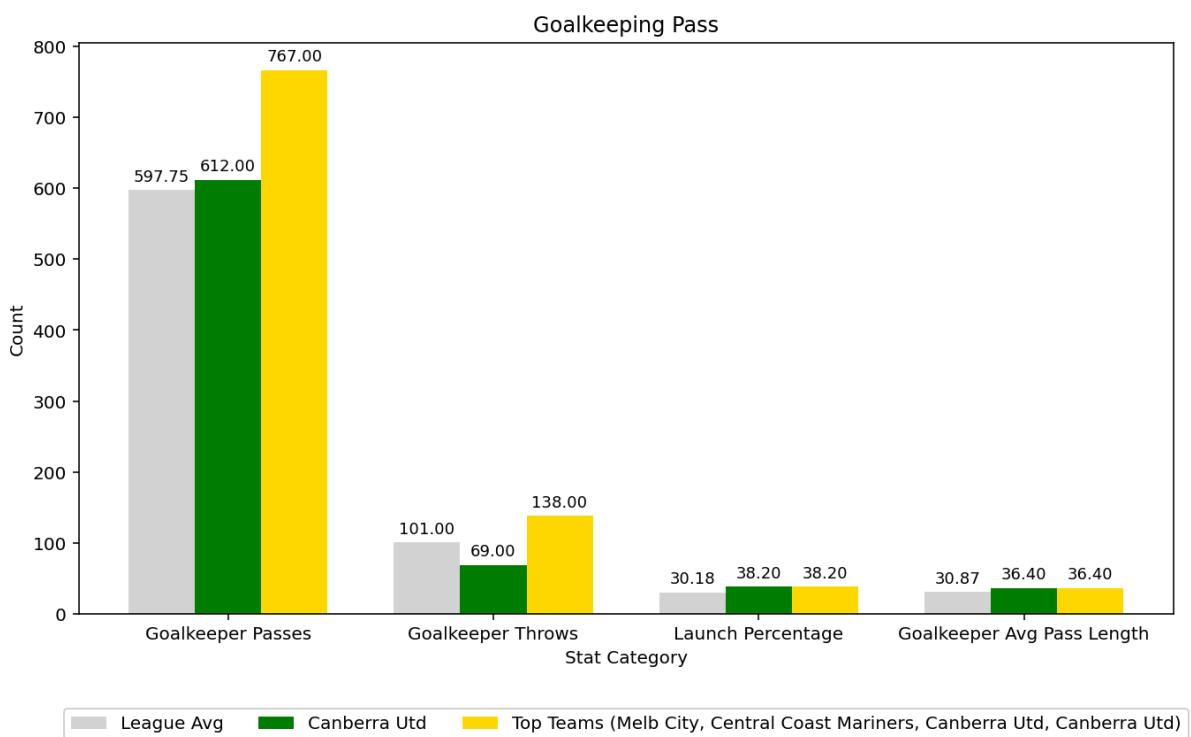


Figure 28: Goalkeeping passes compared to League average and top teams.

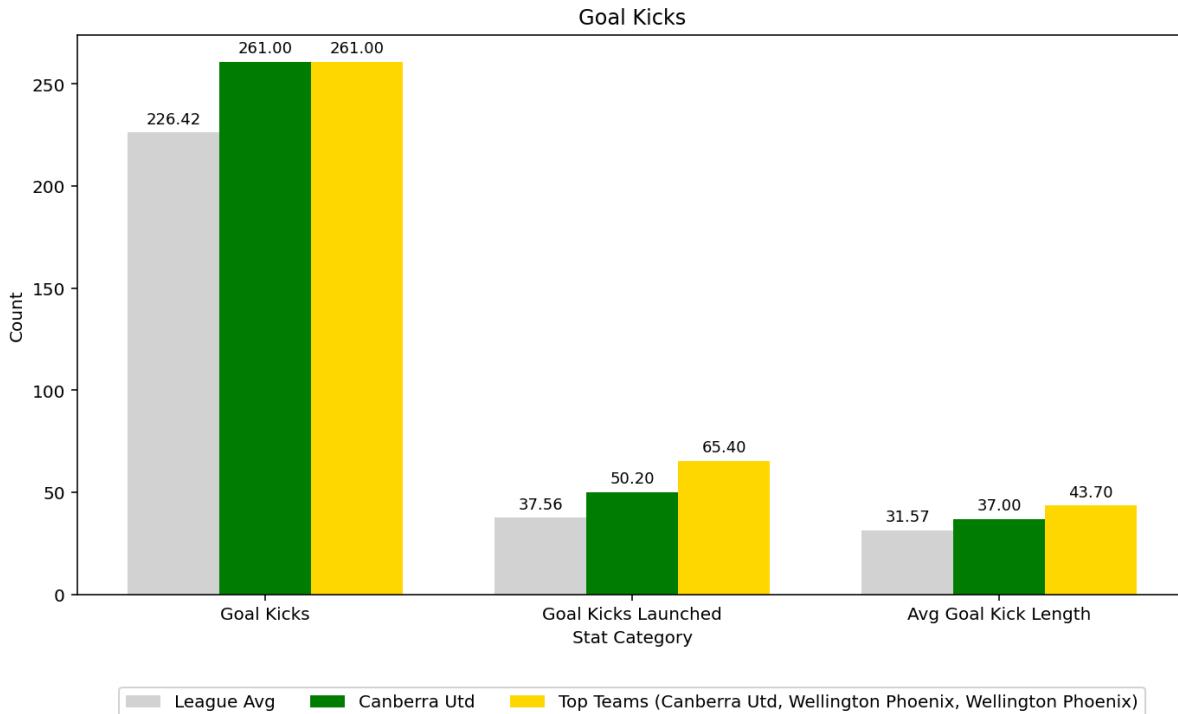


Figure 29: Goal kicks compared to League average and top teams.

Now here we have the really important part of the goalkeeper's tactical impact. Their kicking ability is paramount to the success of Canberra United's playing style. Figures 28 & 29 show the high number of passes and goal kicks that are taken, with Canberra United having the most goal kicks. They also show the number of launches (passes longer than 40 yards) that the goalkeeper takes, which is very high. 50 goal kicks launched, far above the average, and 38.2% of total goalkeeper passes being launched, which is the highest in the league. Also the average goalkeeper pass length is the highest in the league, and the average goal kick length is high above average. This indicates how important long passes are to Canberra United's game, and ties in with the long passing numbers displayed in Figures 17 & 18, and proves that much of Canberra United's play starts with the goalkeeper.

Now to take a look at the actual launches. Figure 27 shows the high number of launches attempted and completed, far above the League average, showing that goalkeeper launches are a massive part of their playing style which most other teams do not adopt. However, the launch completion percentage could certainly be improved. It is above average, but for a team that relies so heavily on these launches, I would suggest doing a lot of work in training on long goalkeeper passes out into the midfield and attack and improving the accuracy of these passes and making sure that once these passes have reached their target that there is a plan. The accuracy of the pass is important but the takedown and next pass and move is just as important.

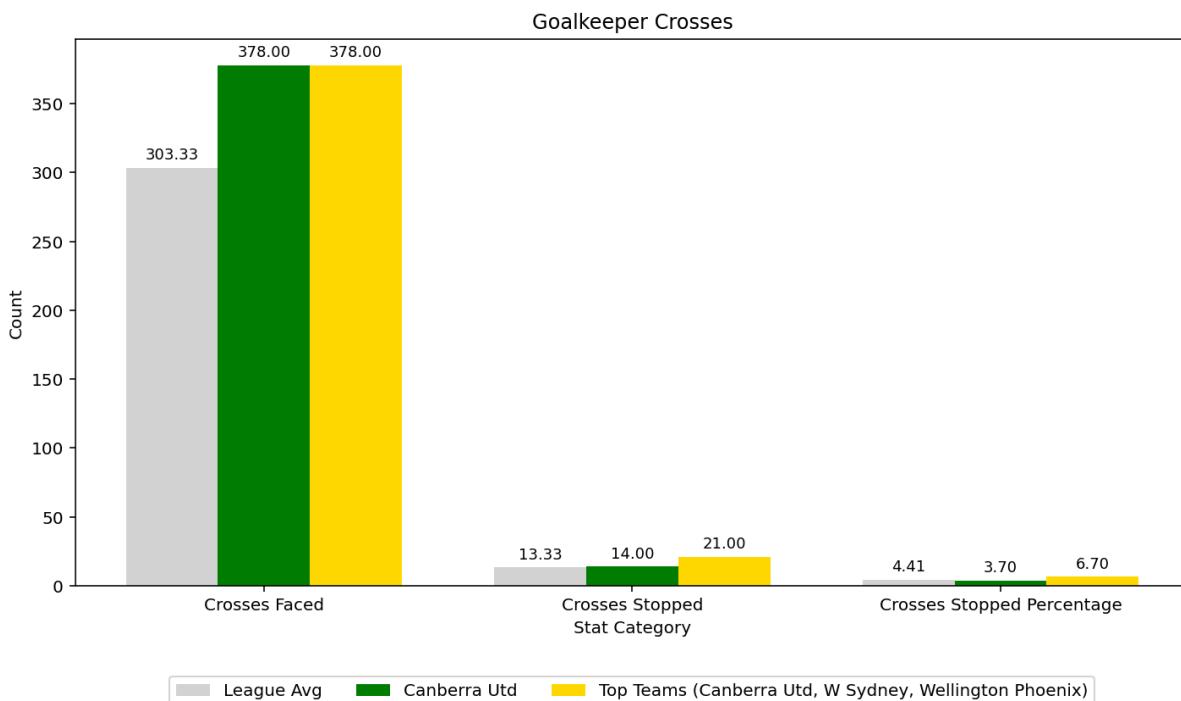


Figure 30: Goalkeeper crosses compared to League average and top teams.

Figure 30 shows how many crosses Canberra United face, which happens to be the most in the league, high above the average. This is a defensive issue that does need to be addressed, mainly for the full backs who need to try and close the wingers down and stop them from putting balls into the box. However, the goalkeeper does not stop many of the crosses that are put into the box, at only 3.7%. This shows the goalkeeper is possibly not so keen on coming out of their goal to collect crosses and command their box, which is something that should be improved upon, especially since Canberra United are facing the most crosses in the league.

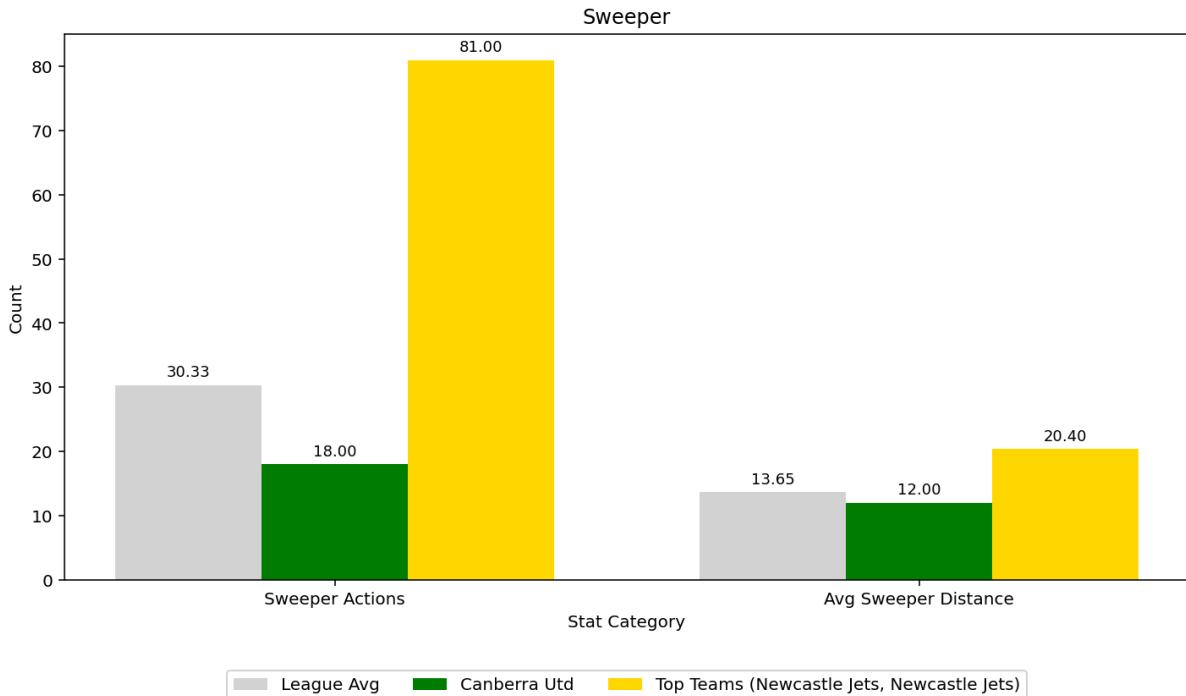


Figure 31: Sweeper stats compared to League average and top teams.

Here in Figure 31 we can see the number of sweeper actions made by the keeper(s) and the average distance they come from their goal line to make a sweeping action. As can be seen, the Canberra United goalkeeper is less comfortable coming out of their goal to stop attackers or clean up the ball coming in behind compared to the league average. This is not something that needs a massive correction, but there is a pattern in terms of lower goalkeeper confidence and command when looking at crosses stopped and sweeping actions. While it's not a problem and many different goalkeepers have different styles, this should be addressed and worked on as the confidence of the entire defensive play of the team begins with the goalkeeper.

In my view, the standard of goalkeeping at Canberra United is high, with good shot-stopping and excellent kicking ability, but improvements in the command and dominance of the keeper are necessary for the team's defensive style of play and confidence in defending.

Links and Correlation

Now we have arrived at the really interesting part: the links that can be made between different areas of the pitch and the correlation of certain statistics to the likelihood of Canberra United performing well. When looking at how different statistics correlate with Canberra United's winning games, we see some very surprising and intriguing things.

Top statistics correlated with wins:

For_gk_passes_launched ----- 0.672764
 Against_tackles_won ----- 0.647906

For_gk_save_pct	---	0.619306
For_touches_def_pen_area	-----	0.568661
For_dispossessed	-----	0.526380
Against_tackles	-----	0.516217
Against_tackles_def_3rd	-----	0.515112
For_gk_pct_goal_kicks_launched	-----	0.508591
Against_tackles_interceptions	-----	0.503384
For_gk_psxg_net	-----	0.492714
For_gk_clean_sheets	-----	0.473879
For_gca_shots	-----	0.473879
For_goals_per_shot	-----	0.458002
Goals For	-----	0.452696
Against_gk_goals_against	-----	0.452696
For_gk_goal_kicks	-----	0.440824
For_gk_passes_completed_launched	-----	0.439713
For_gk_goal_kick_length_avg	-----	0.431447

Firstly I shall explain a couple of things for context. The correlation is measured on a scale of 1 to -1, so these are the strongest 20 (actually 19 because there was a duplicate) statistics correlating with winning starting from top to bottom. It also should be noted that each statistic is accompanied by the words ‘For’ or ‘Against’, simply meaning a statistic that is for Canberra United or against Canberra United (e.g. Against_tackles_interceptions means interceptions against Canberra United).

To start off with, let us look at the very top statistic correlated with winning: ‘For_gk_passes_launched’, or in other words passes launched (passed over 40 yards) by Canberra United’s keeper. This is the most telling piece of analysis so far when it comes to Canberra United’s playing style. Essentially what this means is that the more the goalkeeper launches a long pass forwards the more likely Canberra United are to win the game, and this dictates the chances of winning more than stats like ‘Goals For’ and ‘For_gk_clean_sheets’. Another way to interpret this is that the keeper’s launched passes forward are more valuable than a goal scored or a clean sheet to Canberra United’s chances of winning a game. This trend can be seen elsewhere as also within the top statistics are: ‘For_gk_pct_goal_kicks_launched’, ‘For_gk_goal_kicks’, ‘For_gk_passes_completed_launched’, ‘For_gk_goal_kick_length_avg’. These are all very similar, in the sense that they imply the number of goalkeeper passes, specifically long goalkeeper passes, give Canberra United a very good chance of winning.

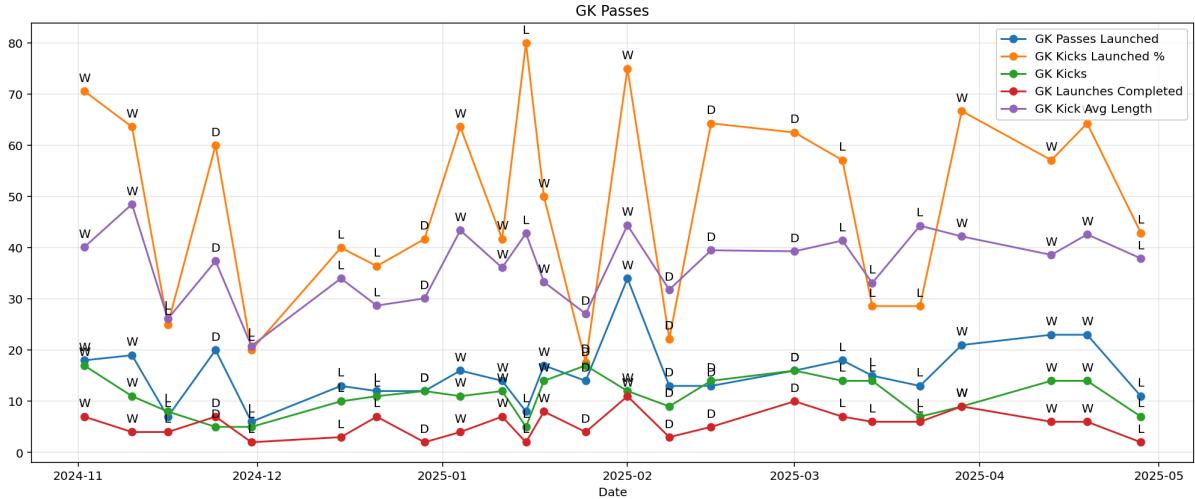


Figure 32: Goalkeeping passing stats throughout the season, annotated with the results.

In Figure 32 we can see clearly where this surprising correlation stems from. Focusing specifically on the blue, orange and purple lines a pattern emerges. They all follow similar trend lines, with slight differences where one or two data points may increase while the other decreases, but in general we see that wins tend to come when each statistic's trend line is at a peak, and losses tend to come when each trend line has a trough. At the very least, wins seem to come when each statistic is above average, and losses come when each statistic is below average.

This confirms just how important the goalkeeper's passing ability is to Canberra United's playing, being quite possibly the most important asset at Canberra United's disposal.

With this in mind I can only recommend that the goalkeeper continues to send long passes up the field at every appropriate opportunity, whether it be from goal kicks and free kicks, from their hands, or from live passes. I would also recommend that the ball be played to the goalkeeper for launches when the possession is with the defence and no better options are available.

I do think this especially emphasises the need to work on these long passes in training, as mentioned earlier, because the accuracy of the launches is such an important part of keeping possession and creating a chance from the long ball forward. Ideally this would be worked on with the players who would usually be at the receiving end of these launches as well so that they can practice different attacking moves and options for play once the ball has been brought down.

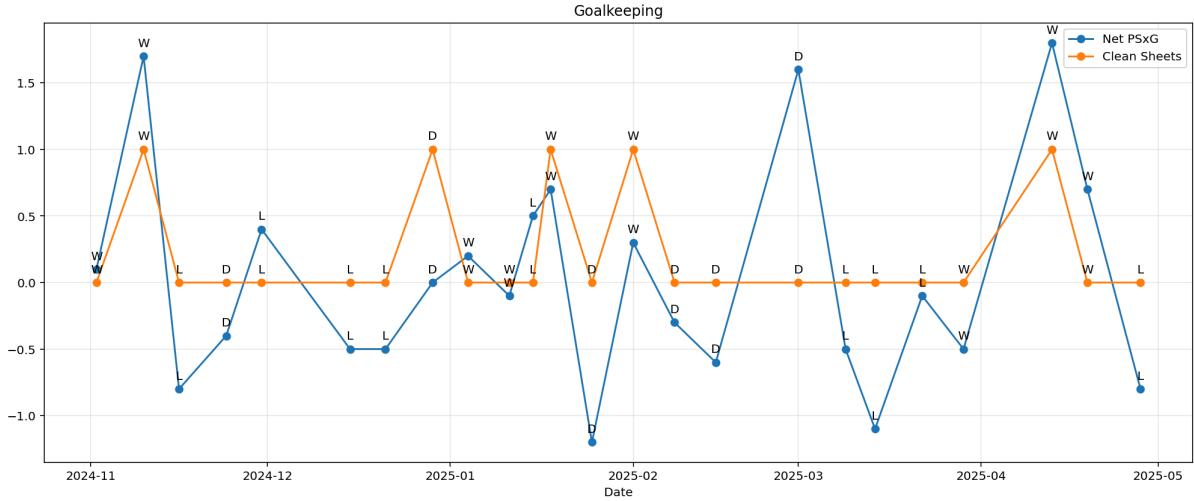


Figure 33: Goalkeeping stats throughout the season, annotated with the results.

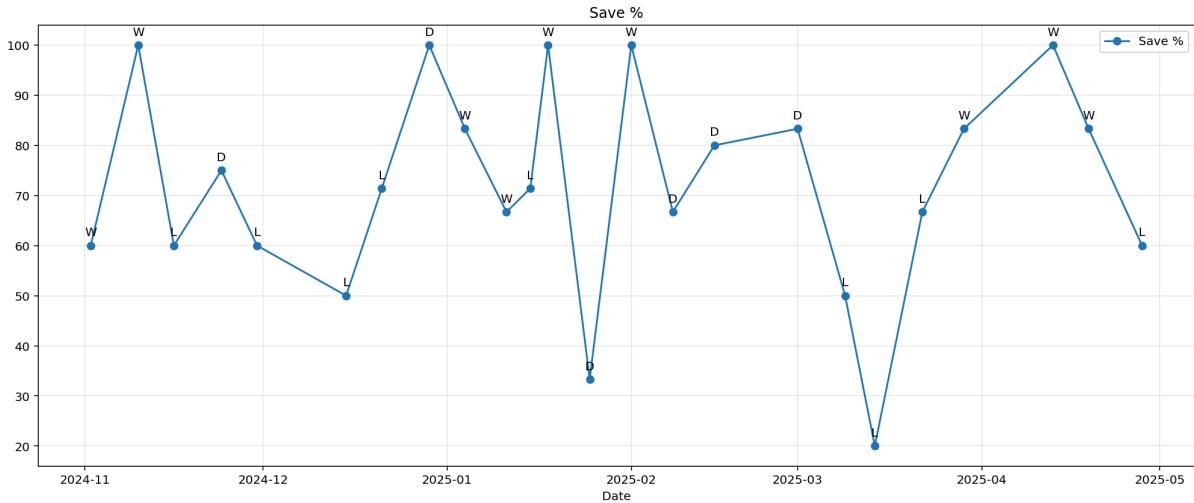


Figure 34: Goalkeeping save percentage throughout the season, annotated with the results.

To stick to the theme of goalkeeping, let us look at the goalkeeper's shotstopping ability and how it impacts Canberra United's chances of winning. The third most important statistic correlated with wins is 'For_gk_save_pct', going to show how crucial this aspect of the goalkeeper's game is as well as passing, as shown in Figure 34. Also high up are 'For_gk_psxg_net' and 'For_gk_clean_sheets', shown in Figure 33. Of course it goes without saying that a clean sheet will only help the chances of winning, but 4 out of the 9 wins Canberra United had in the 2024-25 season came from clean sheets. Since there were only 5 clean sheets all season, it means 80% of the time Canberra United keep a clean sheet they win the game.

It also makes sense that a higher net PSxG would mean the better chance of a win, because better shotstopping would imply less goals conceded. This shows as 7 out of the 9 wins came when the PSxG was positive, and 7 out of the 9 losses came when PSxG was negative. This links in with Figure 34, showing the save percentage throughout the season. We can see that 7 of the 9 wins come when the save percentage is 80% or higher, and all of the losses come

when the save percentage is lower than 80%. Clearly 80% is the figure to aim for in terms of shotstopping, and while it is easier said than done, a positive PSxG almost always returns a good result.

All of what we have covered so far in Figures 32, 33, & 34 show the paramount importance of Canberra United's goalkeeper, and how their form can dictate each game.

Now we move on to the other very peculiar finding: the tackles against Canberra United and how these correlate to wins. The second best statistic at predicting a Canberra United win is 'Against_tackles_won', which along with 'Against_tackles', 'Against_tackles_def_3rd', and 'Against_tackles_interceptions' form some quite confusing correlations with wins. These are confusing because the opponent's defensive success should logically result in less wins, yet Canberra United seem to be capitalising from facing strong defensive teams, or at least teams that tackle and intercept possession a lot.

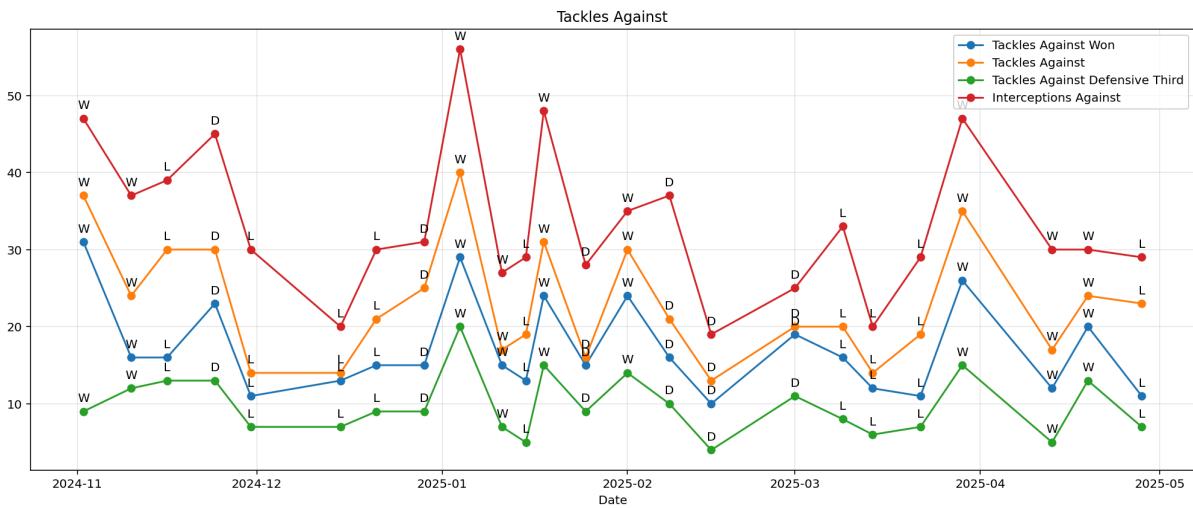


Figure 35: Tackles and interceptions by Canberra United's opponents throughout the season, annotated with the results.

Figure 35 shows very similar trends for each of these stats, with a couple of occasional small differences in the trend lines. Of course, as established, wins come when each of these statistics is higher than average. The likely explanation would be that a more dominant attacking game would result in the opposition having a lot of tackles, and even if there are a lot of tackles won there will also be many times where a strong attacking Canberra United managed to penetrate the defence and have chances on goal. However, by shifting our focus to the statistics 'For_gca_shots', 'For_goals_per_shot', and 'Goals For', we can potentially see a different story.

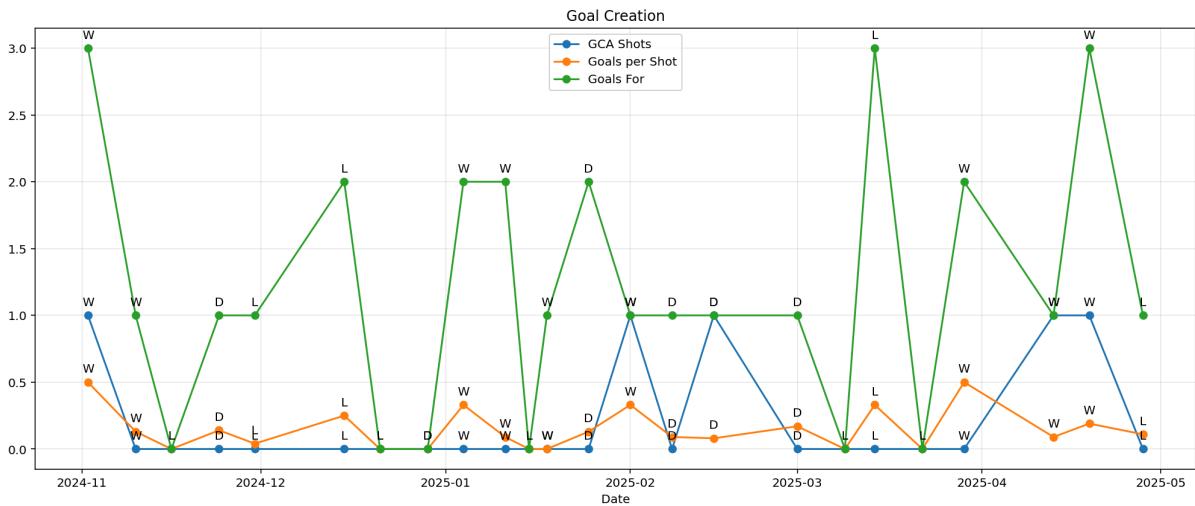


Figure 36: Goals and creation stats throughout the season, annotated with the results.

What we see in Figure 36 is nowhere near the shape of the trend line we have in Figure 35. A few of the wins do show similar spikes in both figures, but overall there is not necessarily a correlation between a strong attacking performance and a strong defensive performance from the other team. Two clear examples are the two times that Canberra United faced three losses in a row, the first coming in December 2024, and the second coming in March 2025. The middle loss of both of these trios of losses showed a strong attacking performance from Canberra United, where they scored 2 goals and 3 goals, respectively, and had high goals per shots ratios at $x > 0.25$ in both games. However, looking at Figure 35 and searching for these games we see a complete polar opposite, where the opposition team seemingly had very poor defensive performances in both games, with these two losses being two of the worst 3 or 4 defences Canberra United played against all season.

Now it is true that a strong attacking Canberra United performance will not always be counteracted with a solid defensive performance from the opposition in which they have a lot of tackles, but what this certainly does prove is that an opposition's poor defensive performance does not always correlate with a poor attacking performance from Canberra United. That being said, both results were losses so the opposition's tackling statistics are more accurate at predicting wins than Canberra United's attacking play anyway.

I would still theorise that the most likely reason that the opposition's defensive statistics are so good at predicting wins are due to them coinciding with a strong attacking performance from Canberra United, as we can see that the majority of the spikes in Figure 36 coincide with some sort of spike in Figure 35, although the shapes are different.

Also, it is apparent that GCA following a shot being taken almost always results in a win, and so I would recommend something similar to earlier when discussing GCA: shoot more and more goals will come. Whether it be goals from the shots themselves or goals coming from a shot being pushed into the path of a Canberra United attacker, more shots will only improve the likelihood of scoring, and therefore winning games.

Now to touch on the final statistic, being the fourth strongest at predicting a win: 'For_touches_def_pen_area', or touches by Canberra United in their own penalty area. This

is intriguing again, as touches in the defensive penalty area wouldn't usually mean a team has a better chance of winning, but I think Canberra United are a slightly different case than many other teams. I can only assume that the more touches in the defensive penalty area implies a better control over the game, with more possession and probably more time on the ball. It also links in with the goalkeeper's passing, as many of the touches in the penalty area will be taken by the goalkeeper, and so the more of these touches the keeper takes, the more passes are taken, and the more passes that are taken, the more launches are passed and the higher the likelihood of winning.

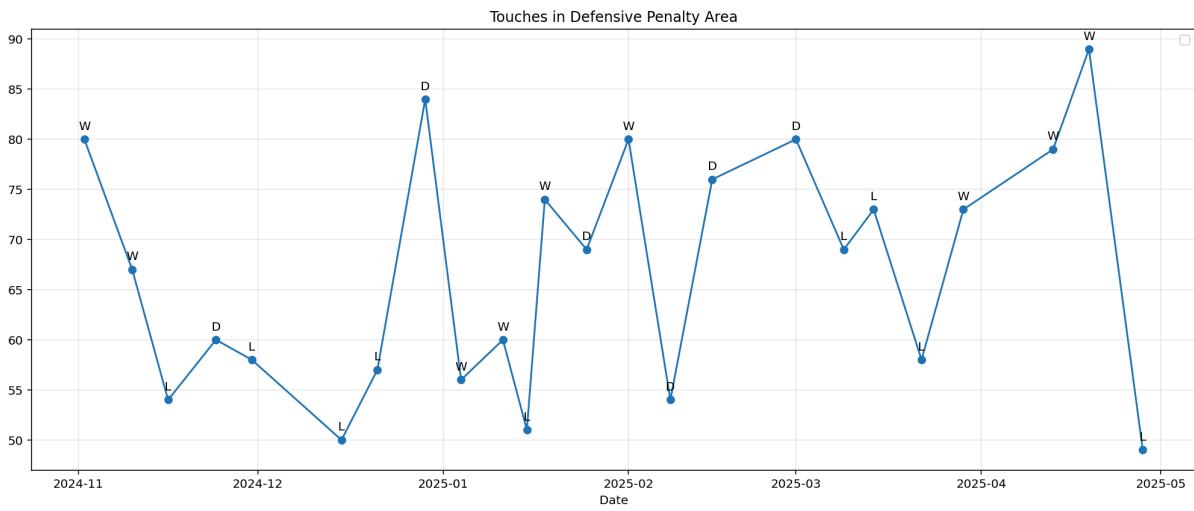


Figure 37: Touches in the defensive penalty area throughout the season, annotated with the results.

As can be seen in Figure 37, the more touches in the defensive penalty area, the more wins. 6 out of the 9 wins come from Canberra United having over 70 touches per game in the defensive penalty area, whereas 8 out of the 9 losses come from having under 70 touches in the penalty area. Clearly it is beneficial to have more concentrated possession in the penalty area, specifically with the goalkeeper, to maximise the amount of long passes that can be made and to keep the ball safely away from the opposition.

Opponents

To finalise the report, let us take a look at the way Canberra United fare against each opponent. Since they are not playing in any other major competition other than the A-League, there are only 11 opponents to look at.

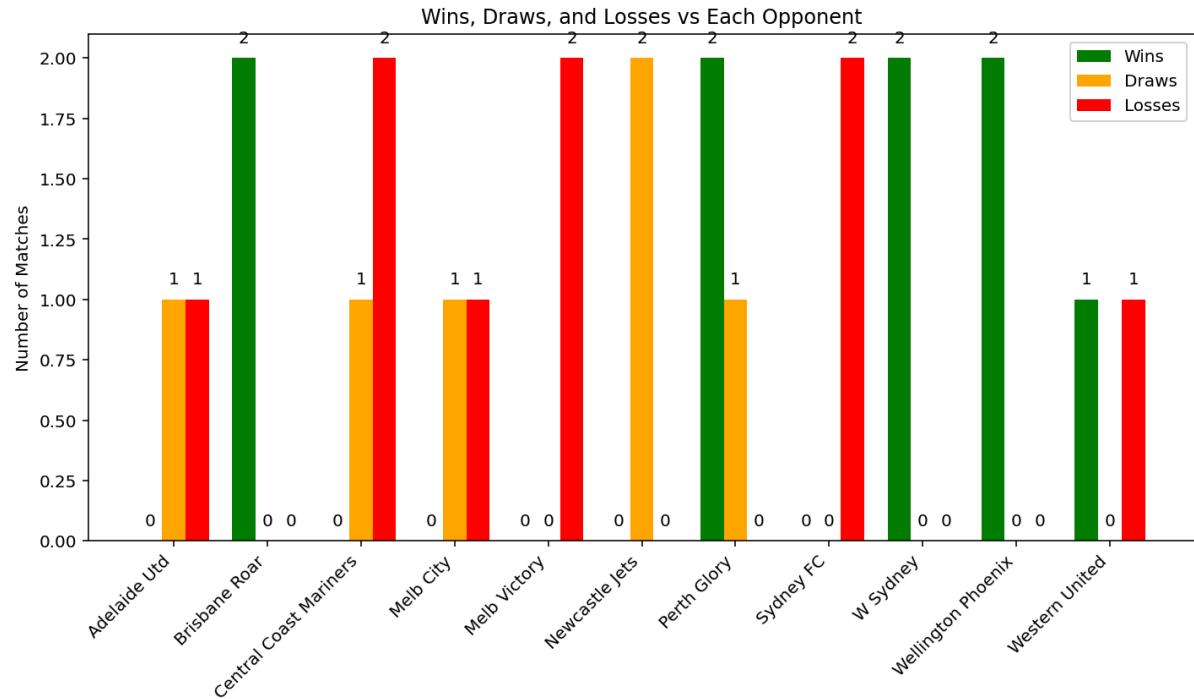


Figure 38: Results per opponent for the 2024-25 season.

Figure 38 shows the number of wins, draws and losses by the opponent throughout the 2024-25 season. Canberra United played Perth Glory 3 times within the regular League season and played every other team twice, playing Central Coast Mariners once more in the first round of the end-of-season play-off finals. It is clear who Canberra United's preferred opposition are, being Brisbane Roar, Perth Glory, Western Sydney Wanderers, Wellington Phoenix, and mixed results against Newcastle Jets and Western United leave these two teams undecided in terms of favoured opponents or not. Canberra United finished well above both Newcastle Jets and Western United, as these teams finished 11th and 12th, respectively. This means that, on paper, these games should be ones that Canberra United should be performing better in and can win home and away.

There are multiple teams that have given Canberra United a hard time also: Central Coast Mariners (who won the league in the play-offs), Melbourne City and Melbourne United (who finished 1st and 2nd in the league before the play-offs), Sydney FC and Adelaide United. It would be worthwhile to make extra preparations before playing these teams, by taking a careful look at the way they set up and opposing their tactics with a style that counteracts the way they like to play. A defensive team like Canberra United should try to set up in such a manner that makes it very difficult to play against when playing the better teams who tend to beat them, similar to the way in which managers such as Sean Dyche or Diego Simeone set up their teams.

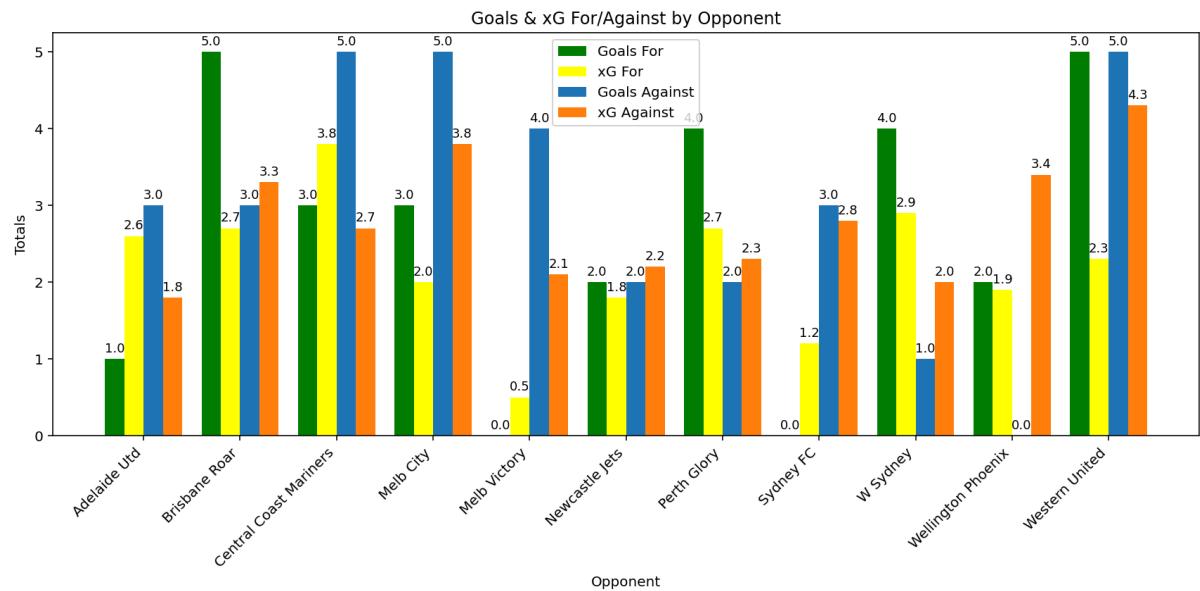


Figure 39: Goals and xG for and against each opponent in the League.

In Figure 39 we can see in more depth the teams that are managing to get through Canberra United's defence effectively, and the teams that Canberra United tend to attack well against. Central Coast Mariners, Melbourne City, Melbourne Victory and Western United all scored a lot of goals (4+) against Canberra United, and Brisbane Roar, Melbourne City, Wellington Phoenix and Western United all had a lot of xG (3+) against Canberra United. I would suggest that a very precise and detailed defensive tactical system is worked on when facing these teams. It is positive to see 5 teams (Brisbane Roar, Newcastle Jets, Perth Glory, Western Sydney Wanderers, and Wellington Phoenix) fail to outscore their xG against Canberra United, meaning the opponents are taking shots from good positions but not converting them. It is an issue for the defence to be allowing xG, but either defenders putting the attackers off or the goalkeeper making good saves are stopping the attacking team from converting their good shots. Western Sydney Wanderers scored once and Wellington Phoenix did not score at all against Canberra United, whilst having xG's of 2.0 and 3.4, respectively, implying their attacking players have a poorer finishing ability than the rest of the league. This insinuates there is probably slightly less to worry about from a defensive standpoint when playing these two teams, although it is wise to be cautious nevertheless. These games could be opportunities to rest important goalkeepers and defenders.

Canberra United recorded a lot of goals against Brisbane Roar, Perth Glory, Western Sydney Wanderers, and Western United, but only had a high amount of xG against one team: Central Coast Mariners. The lack of xG is something that should be worked on, since it means Canberra United are not making many chances to take shots in good positions. However, we do see that they are good at converting from lower xG, as they only had 4 teams (Adelaide United, Central Coast Mariners, Melbourne Victory, and Sydney FC) stop them from outscoring their xG, meaning Canberra United scored many of their goals from difficult positions. However, they failed to score against both Melbourne Victory and Sydney FC, and scored only once against Adelaide United, with xG's of 0.5, 1.2, and 2.6. The lack of goals

and xG against Melbourne Victory implies they are a very dominating team and one that Canberra United will struggle to break down and score against or even create attacks against. For this fixture specifically I would suggest a very low block with 9,10 or even 11 players behind the ball when not in possession, and attempting to get forward when possible mainly with the intention of receiving set pieces, either corners or free kicks, and potentially throw ins if a long throw is possible. I would also suggest a similar strategy against Sydney FC, although it seems as though Canberra United have been able to create more chances and a better xG against them so maybe not such an extreme defensive strategy is necessary. However, against Adelaide United, Canberra United recorded their 5th highest xG, so clearly creation isn't such an issue against Adelaide United. Seemingly their goalkeeper must be putting in good performances and their defence able to put off attackers when taking shots. For this fixture I would recommend extra finishing training, especially as this is a team that is definitely beatable with Canberra United's quality, yet in the 2024-25 season struck Canberra United with a draw and a defeat. The performance is there in general against Adelaide United, but the finishing just is not quite good enough to turn these draws and defeats into wins.

Conclusions

To round this off let us summarise the key points:

- Canberra United's playstyle is far more defensive than attacking, with little creativity going forward, but with a direct and efficient form of attack they score more goals and get into better positions than would be suggested based on their playstyle.
- More is needed going forward and in defence if Canberra United want to be challenging amongst the top teams. The issue is not the playstyle, as winning teams can adopt similar defensive styles, but the attack must be more efficient than it already is, and the defence must be one of the top one or two, possibly three, in the league to be able to play this way effectively. Better finishing and finding effective ways to score with minimal chances is a necessity.
- Extra goals from set pieces is a change that is necessary for Canberra United's game. They have aerial superiority over most teams, and have little creativity in the final third, so trying to get throw-ins, corners, and free kicks are an excellent alternative to trying to pass the ball into the penalty area, which is not their strong point.
- The high point is the standard of goalkeeping at Canberra United, which is excellent. Saving an expected 1.3 goals throughout the season, a 100% penalty save record, and a great level of passing that is extremely important to Canberra United's play, with long passes starting from the goalkeeper winning more games than anything else in their arsenal. The main improvement to be made is the keeper's confidence and command in and around the box.
- Passing accuracy, specifically the long passes and goalkeeper launches, is something that could do with improving and is also easily improved. The efficiency of Canberra United's attack and the chances of keeping the ball in possession, and therefore the likelihood of winning games, improves massively if Canberra United can work on the accuracy of their long passing.

- An approach of focusing on each opponent game to game could be a good option, as Canberra United have good form against some 4 or so opponents (Brisbane Roar, Perth Glory, Western Sydney Wanderers, Wellington Phoenix), and so similar tactics should be deployed against these teams as they have already been playing in previous matches. However, Canberra United have experienced pretty bad form against 5 teams (Central Coast Mariners, Melbourne City, Melbourne United, Sydney FC and Adelaide United), so a complete change in tactical style should be deployed against these 5 teams in future, ideally tactics which completely oppose those of the opponent, shutting down their attack routes and exploiting their weaknesses in defence.
- Potential improvements in midfield could unite the solid defending and direct attacking, especially with the inclusion of the long passes and launches from the goalkeeper. The attack should be linked in more with play by the midfield, and the defence should receive more cover from the midfield as well, so I would recommend recruitment in both defensive minded midfielders and attacking midfielders, and focused training for the current Canberra United midfielders.

All things considered, Canberra United had a good season overall. They were one of the lowest scoring teams, yet finished in the top half in a respectable 5th position, getting into the finals of the league season, and going out to the team who went on to win the finals: Central Coast Mariners. This was a season to be happy about, with many good areas on the pitch and many areas to build upon. The players and staff at the club should be quite optimistic about the 2025-26 season, as Canberra United are just a few small but impactful changes away from competing with the best teams in the league.