

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a master's degree in Management the Nova School of Business and Economics.

**Unlocking Growth Potential: A Strategic Approach to Boosting Competitiveness in Smaller European Football Leagues – The Competitive Edge: Leveraging Innovation and Technology and Assessing Unique League Development Opportunities**

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17/12/2024

Lisbon, 16.12.2024

**Abstract**

This thesis examines the challenges and opportunities for small European football leagues in enhancing their competitiveness and attractiveness, in collaboration with *UEFA*. Using an exploratory mixed-methods and benchmarking approach, this thesis introduces two frameworks: the *League Success Model*, a holistic tool for evaluating league performance, and the *Playbook Model*, which analyzes sports industry best practices. The introduction of innovation and technologies offer actionable recommendations aligned with *UEFA*'s goals. By addressing academic gaps and providing practical applications, this thesis advances the understanding of league success while contributing novel insights into sports management.

**Acknowledgement:** We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our supervisor, Pedro Brinca, for his unwavering support and invaluable guidance throughout the development of this master's thesis. His constructive feedback was essential in shaping our research and writing. We also wish to thank *UEFA*, our partner for this thesis, with special appreciation to Phil Taylor for his time and invaluable contributions. Finally, we express our deep gratitude to the expert interview participants, whose insights and experiences were crucial to the construction of this thesis.

**Keywords:** Keywords: Football, Small Football leagues, European Football, UEFA, Growth Strategies, Strategic Analysis, League Best Practices, Swedish football, Allsvenskan, Innovation in Football

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## 1 Introduction (Group Part)

Sport has been an integral part of human culture for millennia, with activities like swimming, boxing, and archery enjoyed as far back as ancient times. As time progressed, sports has changed significantly and has evolved into a massive global industry, marked by unprecedented levels of maturity, professionalization, and commercialization (Schmidt 2020). The growth of the sports industry even outpaces global GDP and is expected to reach \$700B by 2026 (Kearney 2022; R&M 2022). Hereby, football stands out as the clear leader as well, generating total revenues of just under \$57B in 2024 (Statista 2024a). With over two-thirds of the revenue, Europe leads as the primary football market (Statista 2024b). The leadership role of football is supported by an estimated amount of four billion fans worldwide (FIFA 2020).

This thesis is written in partnership with the *Union of European Football Association (UEFA)*. The *UEFA* is the governing body of European football and oversees all 55 national football associations in Europe. Therefore, *UEFA* plays a crucial role in the growth story of European football. *UEFA*'s organizational goals include the promotion of sporting merit, financial sustainability, integrity, and competitive balance across *UEFA* competitions and all domestic leagues (UEFA 2018, 2024a). *UEFA* supports the development of each of its 55 national football associations and their domestic topflight leagues. Changes like the introduction of the *UEFA Conference League* in 2021, a third *UEFA* club competition, ensure that every domestic league has at least one qualifier spot in a *UEFA* club competition (UEFA 2023a). Despite all efforts, major imbalances between domestic leagues in European football exist, in sporting quality as well as financial resources. Within public consent, a *Big Five* has formed, consisting of the English, German, Italian Spanish, and French 'leagues. Those five leagues account for half of European football revenue and are the focus of important academic works over the past decade, as highlighted by Schreyer (full transcript is displayed in Interview 1) (Statista 2024c). If academic studies go beyond these five leagues, they usually

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research leagues still ranking in the top 15 of the *UEFA country coefficient* (Appx. 1), such as Savas's study on Turkish league competitive balance (2022), the study of Mustafi, Bayle, and Terrien (2024) on the Swiss league's revenue, or Ribero and Lima's (2012) study on the Portuguese league (UEFA 2024b). Leagues beyond often lack academic appreciation.

For the purposes of this thesis, leagues are categorized into three clusters based on sporting performance: *big leagues* (the *Big Five*), *medium leagues* (ranked 6–15 in the *UEFA country coefficient*), and *small leagues* (ranked below 15) (UEFA 2024b). These clusters, developed in collaboration with *UEFA*, provide a clear analysis framework for this thesis. *Small* European football leagues often experience financial challenges, for example due to missing out on group stage of *UEFA* club competitions, which results in lost prize money and diminished international visibility. These barriers, among others, highlight the need for this thesis. It addresses a vital academic gap by applying insights from successful leagues and other sports to *small* football leagues, thereby helping them to increase their long-term attractiveness and competitiveness. Further, this thesis challenges the present standard on measuring league success and contradicts the currently existing one-dimensional models, which either look on the sporting, financial, or societal perspective. Therefore, this thesis advances theoretical frameworks. In practical terms, this thesis offers strategic insights to *UEFA*, their national associations, as well as further stakeholders and helps league officials to get insights into future growth opportunities.

In collaboration with *UEFA*, this paper aims to achieve four main research objectives:

1. Develop a holistic, multi-dimensional model to measure and analyze league success.
2. Identify best practices from successful sports leagues and clubs and evaluate their adaptability to small European football leagues in a structured and unified approach.
3. Explore how innovation and technology can drive differentiation and create unique positioning for small European football leagues.

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4. Discover the applicability of findings to one specific small European football league, analyze their strategic actions, and develop strategic recommendations for the future.

To accomplish these research goals, this thesis explores one overarching research question (RQ) and two subordinate questions, which support in answering the overarching RQ. While the overarching RQ was based on gaps in academic literature and *UEFA* preferences, the subordinate RQs developed from identified research gaps in literature and iterative review of expert interviews:

RQ 1: How can small European football leagues increase their attractiveness and competitiveness and therefore unlock their growth potential?

RQ 1.1: How can sports industry best practices be evaluated and applied to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of small European football leagues?

RQ 1.2: How can small European football leagues leverage innovation and technology to close the competitive gap to bigger leagues while developing unique selling points to unlock their growth potential?

To answer the highlighted RQs, this thesis employs an exploratory mixed-methods approach to address limited existing studies on *small* leagues (Almeida 2018). This thesis uses a traditional benchmarking process to introduce two novel models supporting the development of *small* European football leagues. Primary data was collected through four semi-structured, verbal interviews as well as three semi-structured, written interviews and were manually coded based on the grounded theory. Secondary data, both qualitative and quantitative, was drawn from academic literature, industry reports, trusted journalistic, and internet sources to ensure relevance.

This thesis focuses on *small* European football leagues, their current position, strategic approaches, competitiveness, attractiveness as well as their sporting, financial, and societal challenges compared to more successful leagues worldwide. The initial literature review defines success in broad contexts and highlights its application in business and sports. Additionally, factors for

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success in business and sports, especially in the long-term, are identified from published research. Following, this thesis introduces its general methodology in detail before explaining the methodology, application, purpose, and results of both newly introduced models. Both models comprise essential steps of Camp's (1989) benchmarking process. The first model, the *League Success Model (LSM)*, presents a holistic way of measuring league success including a sporting, financial, and societal dimension. The thesis then introduces the *Playbook Model*. This model is based on an *Evaluation Framework*, which gathers sports industry best practices, and analyzes their adaptability and potential for *small* European football leagues. The *Playbook Model* visualizes the best practices in a four-quadrant scheme, with each quadrant resulting in different strategic recommendations. To enhance usability, both models allow for adjustable weights, enabling users to tailor importance to strategic priorities and varying circumstances.

Section 5.1 gives a detailed discussion of the best practices in general, before diving deeper into innovative technology use cases in section 5.2. Afterwards, the discussion highlights how *small* European football leagues can differentiate themselves in the highly competitive market to increase international attention and recognition to develop a unique identity and a *unique selling point (USP)*. The final chapter presents strategic recommendations to achieve the fourth research goal. Those will be applied to the case of the Swedish highest football league, *Allsvenskan*, to assess the practicability of recommendations. This chapter highlights the league's past and current strategic actions, analyzes key characteristics, and assesses the league's potential based on strategic recommendations and a proposed timetable. Finally, this thesis synthesizes its findings and provides actionable insights for enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of *small* European football leagues, contributing to *UEFA*'s mission of inclusivity and balance.

## **2 Literature Review (Group Part)**

The following literature review explores diverse conceptualizations and metrics of success across disciplines, with a specific focus on business and sports. It highlights the evolution of success in modern contexts and provides a foundation for understanding the measuring of success in football, setting the stage for subsequent discussions on its multifaceted dimensions.

### **2.1 Definition of Success**

Success is a multifaceted concept, varying in interpretation across individuals and disciplines. In general, success is defined as the realization of a goal or purpose (Pearsall 1996). However, what constitutes success can differ significantly based on context (Heslin 2005). In academic papers, success is commonly divided into two types: objective and subjective. Objective success refers to measurable, externally observable outcomes (Sturges 1999). This is emphasized in performance-driven contexts, where *Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)* are used to assess success. Contrarily, subjective success, is defined by personal satisfaction and fulfilment (Heslin 2005). The definition of success has evolved over time, particularly considering global changes. In modern contexts, success often requires adaptability and innovation. Thus, success became a dynamic concept, exemplarily evidenced by the fact that sustainability has become an imminent element of success over past decades, particularly in business (Schwab 2017; Elkington and Rowlands 1999). Despite evolving perspectives, success in many fields still heavily relies on quantifiable indicators, critical for assessing performance and aiding decision-making. Given these definitions, this thesis' focus shifts towards the objective and measurable aspects of success, particularly in business and sports.

### **2.2 Success in Business**

In modern economics, the concept of success increasingly encompasses both financial and non-financial dimensions. While traditional financial indicators, such as revenue and profit, remain

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important, the globalized business landscape and rising expectations from diverse stakeholder groups have broadened the perspective of success to incorporate social and environmental responsibilities (Norton and Kaplan 1996). This expanded view introduces the notion of *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*, recognizing the value of a company's impact beyond purely financial performance (Elkington and Rowlands 1999; Rugman and Verbeke 2004). In addition to financial outcomes, economic literature often describes success as a firm's capacity to achieve strategic objectives and generate value for its stakeholders. A crucial aspect of this involves the effective utilization of internal resources to secure competitive advantages (Barney 2000). Thus, in today's business ecosystem, success involves mixing financial stability with social accountability and fostering the resilience required to adapt over time. This multidimensional method to success aims to create sustainable value benefiting all stakeholders (Kramer and Porter 2011).

### **2.2.1 Factors in the Economy of Long-Term Success**

To improve day-to-day operations, a company must set short-term goals to obtain immediate results and maintain focus. Nevertheless, to survive in today's dynamic economic landscape, it is essential for companies to prioritize long-term goals to achieve a sustainable advantage in a competitive market. In increasingly globalized and technology-driven markets, decision-making, adaptation to new technologies, and resilience to economic shifts must occur at an accelerated pace. To achieve this, firms must invest into key resources such as human capital, technology, and strategic adaptability. This is essential for enduring economic cycles and maintaining relevance (Makhbul and Hasun 2011). Furthermore, Gumel and Bardai (2023) highlight that a long-term perspective enables firms to balance immediate operational goals with broader developmental objectives, fostering sustainable innovation. Investment into a long-term approach also ensures continuous economic growth since businesses committed to sustainable development contribute to job creation, enhance productivity, and reduce economic disparities (Saxena, Seetharaman, and

Shawarikar 2024). Published works emphasize several factors to ensure long-term success, such as continually integrating technological innovations as well as a comprehensive digital transformation, as these enhance efficiency and responsiveness. Emerging technologies such as *Artificial Intelligence (AI)* or data analytics let companies enhance their strategic adaptability, understand emerging customer needs, legal requirements, and market trends faster and react more efficiently (Bughin et al. 2019). Such adaptability goes hand in hand with increased customer loyalty and long-term viability, which is increasingly important during economic shifts (Hanson et al. 2016). Another important factor is access to capital and financial stability to fund expansions, invest in technology, and survive economic downturns (Beck, Demirgüç-Kunt, and Levine 2000). Stable financing structures enable operational resilience which benefits the company's longevity and market positioning (Ayyagari, Demirgüç-Kunt, and Maksimovic 2011). Other vital factors in the literature contain customer-centric innovation (Fader 2020), agility, organizational flexibility (Rigby, Sutherland, and Takeuchi 2016), or awareness of *CSR* (Carroll and Shabana 2010).

### **2.2.2 Measuring Corporate Success**

In academic literature, various models to measure corporate success have emerged, each emphasizing distinct perspectives. Combined, these views offer a comprehensive perspective of success evaluation, accounting for short- and long-term outcomes, financial and non-financial metrics, as well as internal and external factors. The *profit maximization model* asserts that the primary objective of a business is to maximize its profits. Proponents of this model argue that a focus on profit not only drives corporate success but also ultimately benefits society by promoting efficient resource allocation (Friedman 2007). Building upon the profit maximization model, the *shareholder value maximization* places greater emphasis on creating long-term share value. Unlike a focus on immediate profits, this approach considers sustainable growth by advocating for a balanced approach between short-term returns and long-term investor security (Jensen 2002). The

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*stakeholder value model* broadens the scope and suggests that a company achieves greater long-term success when accounting for the financial interests of shareholders alongside needs and expectations of other stakeholders in its decision-making process. It complements the *shareholder value model* by fostering a more inclusive and responsible approach of corporate management (Freeman 2010). A more quantifiable approach, while still implementing the views of all main stakeholders, can be achieved using the *balanced scorecard*. It complements earlier models by incorporating both financial and non-financial metrics to assess company success. The scorecard examines multiple perspectives, including financial success, customer satisfaction, internal processes, and growth opportunities, enabling a more widespread evaluation of performance comparable to the stakeholder approach (Norton and Kaplan 1996). The *resource based view*, refined by Barney (2000), shifts the focus to a company's internal resources as key drivers of sustainable competitive advantage. By emphasizing unique, hard-to-replicate assets like brand strength, this model offers a perspective particularly relevant to smaller organizations, which often rely on specific strengths to stay competitive (Barney 2000).

Elkington and Rowlands (1999) redefine success along the *Triple Bottom Line (TBL)* model, which incorporates economic, environmental, and societal dimensions. This model challenges companies to go beyond financial profitability and embrace social and environmental responsibilities, promoting sustainability and long-term success over short-term goals. By balancing the three pillars, *TBL* provides a framework for decisions that benefit not just shareholders, but also employees, communities, and the planet (Elkington and Rowlands 1999). Companies incorporating *TBL* and adopting sustainable practices gain a long-term competitive edge and are better equipped to handle external challenges (Dyllick and Hockerts 2002; Hahn et al. 2015). The growing significance of environmental, social, and governance (*ESG*) criteria further reinforces the *TBL*, offering businesses a clear basis to pursue and measure societal goals (Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund,

and Hansen 2012). The introduced models, exemplary for the thousand existing ones, reflect the multifaceted nature of modern organizations, illustrating that success cannot be defined in a one-dimensional way but requires a tailored approach to each organization's unique environment.

### **2.3 Definition and Measuring of Success in Sport**

Sports has evolved from a niche business with athletes, coaches, and other stakeholders hardly earning any salary to a global multi-billion industry in just a few decades. In 2022, total revenue surpassed \$400B for the first time and is expected to grow around 9% annually until 2028 (Manchanda 2020; Statista 2024d). Resultingly, success in sports has developed from a purely emotional topic, where only sporting success counted, into a business, in which success is multi-dimensional and can decide about the lives and jobs of thousands of people. Professionalization and commercialization have primarily driven the transformation of clubs from community-based structures to service-oriented enterprises that compete in both internal and external markets while focusing on economic objectives. This shift leads to new financing models, the development of new business areas, and partnerships with external marketers (Deloitte 2024c; Najafloo 2019; Lehmann and Weigand 2002). Sport, and especially football clubs show fundamental differences and similarities compared to traditional businesses, warranting academic investigation across areas such as objectives, organizational structure, financing, stakeholder management, or success. Whereas financial *KPIs* still dominate the business world, sporting success and athletic performance are the most crucial success metrics in sports (Szymanski and Kuypers 1999). This encompasses achievements such as victories, championships, and records. These performance-based indicators are objective and quantifiable, which positions them at the core of success measurement, especially in professional sports contexts focused on achieving short-term objectives. However, economic stability and revenue growth for sports organizations have

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increased in importance over the past decades (Szymanski and Kuypers 1999). The commercialization of sports continues to expand, exemplary evidenced by the total revenue of European top football leagues, which reached a record €35.3B in the 2022/23 season, an increase compared to the previous season of 16% (Deloitte 2024b). Stable finances provide the foundation to support long-term athletic objectives (Miragaia et al. 2019). Revenue streams such as ticket sales, sponsorship deals, merchandising, or media rights are essential resources for clubs, enabling them to invest strategically in infrastructure, personnel, or player acquisitions, for instance. This financial investment plays a central role in ensuring clubs remain competitive in an ever-evolving market (Deloitte 2024b; Schroeter 2009; Campa Planas and Kalemba 2017). Beyond sporting and economic dimensions, emotional commitment is a vital element of success in the sports context. Unlike other industries, where customer loyalty may be influenced primarily by product quality or brand image, success in sports is deeply intertwined with fan passion and loyalty. Supporters' emotional engagement of the club's cultural significance within its community create a unique social value that is difficult to quantify but crucial for long-term success (Bee and Havitz 2010; Bühler and Nufer 2012). Furthermore, as in business, academic literature increasingly includes social and environmental perspectives in the definition of success in sports. It is argued that societal practices can be just as important for sports organizations as sporting and economic success, especially considering fan loyalty and the clubs' public image (Smith and Westerbeek 2007; Babiak and Trendafilova 2011).

However, success measuring in sports is highly dependable on the perspective and kind of sport. As sports organizations increasingly adopt strategies and behaviors of business enterprises, established business success models become broadly applicable within sports. These models provide valuable insights into multiple dimensions of success, which similarly manifest in the sporting context (Smith and Stewart 2013; Hoye et al. 2018). Nonetheless, for a more precise

measurement of success within the specific sports industry, the *SPLISS* model (Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success) offers a robust approach (Appx. 2). This model delineates nine key factors that are essential for a nation's sporting success like organizational structure, talent development, and competition structures. *SPLISS* does not only provide valuable insights at a national level but is also applicable beyond, offering an ample approach between all essential factors to foster both immediate and long-term success in sports associations (De Bosscher et al. 2016).

In conclusion, a holistic concept of success in sport therefore needs to reflect the balance and interplay of sporting, economic, emotional, societal, and environmental factors, which together form the basis for the long-term development and success of a club.

## **2.4 Success in Football**

### **2.4.1 Markets and Stakeholders in Football Industry**

Football, with its league associations and clubs, occupies the central position within the economic activities of the football ecosystem. The media and the corporate sector act as the goals on the playing field, as illustrated in Appx. 3. A broad audience resonance serves as the fundamental basis for economic success, framing the entire commercial football landscape. This leads to a straightforward equation: the greater the audience reach and demand, the higher the economic success for all stakeholders involved. Furthermore, the TV rights, advertising market, sponsorship, merchandising, and ticketing, highlighted in Appx. 3, represent additional key pillars that play a vital role within the football ecosystem (Vöpel and Steinhardt 2008; Deloitte 2024c; Humphreys et al. 2012). Appx. 4 illustrates the interconnected relationships between key market participants. At the core of this ecosystem are the audience and TV market, interacting with the triangular stakeholders: the league, companies, and broadcasters. As shown in Appx. 4, the league generates

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revenue by selling broadcasting rights to TV networks, which finance themselves through advertising revenues and viewer engagement. In return, broadcasters provide advertisers with airtime for commercials. Additionally, the league secures sponsorship income by granting marketing rights to corporate partners (Vöpel and Steinhardt 2008). The value creation cycle in Appx. 5 underscores the pivotal role of sporting success in driving fan, media, and sponsorship markets, illustrating the intricate interdependence among various stakeholders. Sporting success enhances the appeal and reach of a league or club, boosting demand for stadium attendance and television viewership while stimulating merchandise sales. This increased reach among consumers attracts broadcasting companies willing to invest billions in securing broadcasting rights (Vöpel and Steinhardt 2008; Humphreys et al. 2012; Budzinski et al. 2021). Broadcasters generate revenue by leveraging larger target audiences, which, in turn, attracts enlarged advertising income. This cycle enables further expansion of the audience base, reinforcing the network effects and sustaining the economic model (Rochet 2004). The expanding fan base and heightened media presence, in turn, attract sponsors seeking to capitalize on the broader reach and associated economic benefits. Revenue generated from fans, media, and sponsorships can be strategically reinvested in infrastructure and player transfers, contributing to enhanced quality. This improvement subsequently leads to sporting success, fueling the value creation cycle and, in theory, paving the way for long-term and sustainable growth (Vöpel and Steinhardt 2008; Humphreys et al. 2012).

### **2.4.2 The Importance of Measuring Success in Football**

Similar to the business setting, measuring success in football is crucial while assessing past achievement of goals or future strategic decisions (Kozma and Kazaine 2014). The modern sports industry, especially football, has become more performance- and data-driven than ever (Smith and Stewart 2013). The performance and success of a team or player can only be assessed once it is put into context of an opponent's strength and its environment (e.g. a league), setting benchmarks for

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athletic excellence (Csató 2024). Measuring success in football can provide a basis for the analysis of past behavior, which allows to improve future decision-making (Adambekov 2014; Lago-Peñas et al. 2010). It also shows which can be limiting factors and in which are one needs to improve to avoid respective mistakes (Adambekov 2014). Success in football can be measured on a player, club, or league level. Each level evaluates distinct but interrelated metrics which provide valuable insights into the overall performance and growth.

On a player level, success can be measured through individual statistics (goals, assists, pass completion rates, defensive clearances, etc.), trophies (such as *Ballon D'or* or *Player of the Match*), or market value (Di Salvo et al. 2007). These measures allow players to track improvement, set goals or assess their value for contract discussions (Frick 2007). They also serve as a validation of a player's quality which often correlates with commercial value and sponsorship opportunities. In recent years, personal branding and social media (SM) presence have become increasingly important metrics for athletes, reflecting a broader shift in success measurement that values both athletic performance and marketable influence (Wilson, Plumley, and Ramchandani 2013).

On a club level, one can measure sporting success, for example winning competitions such as the national league, domestic cups, or international tournaments. Hereby, the teams' performance is measured over a specific period of time using a league table or knockout stages in the respective competition. This is also a measure of success consistency due to covering several games. Additionally, individual club rankings can be used, such as the *UEFA club coefficient* which take into account key factors such as a team's past performance and the significance of matches played (Csató 2024; UEFA 2024c). This offers an objective evaluation of the current status and strength of a team (Lasek, Szlávik, and Bhulai 2013). Similar to traditional businesses, a club can be measured through financial factors such as revenue or profitability, which are critical for assessing a club's holistic success (Deloitte 2024a). Those factors are often determined by the ability to grow

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a club's fan base, expansion into new markets, or increased revenue generation through ticket sales or commercial deals (Kesenne 2015). To ensure long-term success of a club in the commercialized market, managers must balance business goals with sporting success (O'Brien and Slack 2004).

The final level is the measuring of national leagues success, which is the focus of this thesis. A prominent metric for league success evaluation is the *UEFA country coefficient* (detailed explanation in Appx 1) (UEFA 2024b). It evaluates the performance of a league's teams within European-wide *UEFA* club competitions to create a ranking of the past five years. The coefficient determines how many clubs of a league are allowed to participate in *UEFA* club competitions in the upcoming season, which, in turn, affects league visibility, revenue potential, and attractiveness to players and sponsors (Zambom-Ferraresi et al. 2017). Another angle to look at a league's success is, again, their financial strength. This can be measured via a league's revenues, e.g. negotiated broadcasting deals, ticket sales, or transfer surplus. These factors are an adequate representation of the league's commercial value and its ability to capture the attention of both, domestic and international, audiences (Andreff and Szymanski 2006). Higher revenues can be reinvested into better facilities, coaching staff, and player development, further bolstering the league's reputation and competitive edge which overall further boosts the competitive advantage in general. In line with the rising importance of *TBL* and stakeholder theories in business, also football leagues are expected to increase their activities off the field regarding social and sustainability issues. Yiapanas, Thrassou, and Vrontis (2024) found that football leagues increase their attractiveness, resilience, and sustainability by collaborating with all stakeholders. Football clubs and leagues can gain significant benefits by investing in their communities, for example by local authority partnerships (Walters and Chadwick 2009).

Overall, success measures in football are multidimensional and take into account various factors and indicators. Measuring success is essential for decision-making, benchmarking, goal setting,

and evaluation of financial decisions. As the football industry grows in complexity, the need for comprehensive and precise metrics becomes increasingly vital. While some business models are transferable to sports, a holistic model tailored to the unique dimensions of the sports industry, including sporting, financial, and societal perspectives remains absent in the academic literature.

### **2.4.3 Interdependence and Tension Between Sporting and Economic Success in Football**

The relationship between sporting and financial success in sports organizations is multifaceted and marked by interdependencies and inherent tensions. Achievements in sports can significantly enhance an organization's financial standing, as victories and titles often result in prize money, higher attendance, improved sponsorship deals, and a rise in merchandise revenue. Conversely, a stable financial foundation is indispensable for investing in high-quality staff and robust infrastructure, thereby maintaining long-term competitiveness. Effective management, which balances both sporting and financial objectives, is crucial in this context (Andreff and Staudohar 2000; Andreff and Szymanski 2006; Hamil and Walters 2013). However, conflicts of interest frequently arise, as managers and owners may pursue different goals than players or fans, a situation often described as agency problem. Governance models seek to alleviate these conflicts, aiming to align the interests of all stakeholders involved (Jensen and Meckling 2019; Hoye 2007; Dietl, Franck, and Lang 2008). The pressure to achieve short-term success often drives spending on player transfers, which, without a well-thought long-term plan, can put financial stability at risk if the anticipated sporting success does not materialize (Franck 2014; Beech and Chadwick 2004). To sum up, sporting and economic success are closely intertwined, yet often at odds. To maintain a balance between sporting success and financial stability, a long-term view and good management is crucial (Andreff and Staudohar 2000; Andreff and Szymanski 2006; Franck 2014).

### **2.4.4 Determinants of Success for Leagues and Success Stories**

As discussed in earlier chapters, the most common metrics for assessing league success typically

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circle around financial and sporting performance, societal achievements as well as viewership and audience engagement (TOI 2024; Statista 2024e). This raises the question of which factors and league characteristics are most crucial in driving these outcomes. Zimbalist (2002) identifies three key criteria that influence league success: the league's competitive balance, fan preferences within the respective country, and economic factors such as the implementation of salary caps and the distribution of league revenues. He argues that the *National Football League's (NFL)* success, as an example, mainly results from their immense competitive balance, again deriving from the league's strict salary cap as well as fair revenue distribution among teams. Another popular riser is *Formula 1 (F1)*, experiencing a 26% viewership rise and 80% revenue increase over the past seven years (Mapfre 2024). The reason why *F1* is *turning to gold* are multi-layered according to Brown (2023). *F1* increased attention through a new TV series, which gave fans exclusive insights into the teams' and drivers' lives, allowing them to be closer connected to their preferred driver. The two leagues are also on the industry's forefront on personalized offering within their own streaming subscriptions, *F1 TV*, and *NFL Gamepass*, respectively. Those services redefine user experience, increase fan engagement, and ultimately drive revenue (Bhambwani 2023). Both before-mentioned leagues classify as traditional North American *closed leagues*, meaning that there is no relegation and promotion of teams like typical in Europe. Usually, open leagues face increased challenges to perform as well as their closed counterparts to maintain their competitive balance. However, as this paper focuses exclusively on European open league systems, it aims to also highlight positive examples specific to this type (Buzzacchi, Szymanski, and Valletti 2003).

Putting theory into practice and referring to the *UEFA country coefficient*, the Belgian *Jupiter Pro League*, their highest football league, has risen from 14<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> European best league over the past 15 years and clearly outperform countries with similar or higher population counts like Poland or Sweden (UEFA 2024b). Not only did the Belgian league improve in sporting success, the league

also went from averaging €27M in transfer surplus 15 years ago to recently hitting €226M in one season (Transfermarkt 2024a). This sporting and financial rise came after the league was restructured in the 2009/10 season, cutting the number of teams down from 18 to 16 and introducing playoffs after the regular season (Amies 2023). Moreover, the league stands out amongst 24 selected European football leagues as one with constant competitive balance, a success factor many leagues have been struggling with in the last years (Poli, Ravenel, and Besson 2018). The upswing in financial success can be tied closely to the rise of youth development programs, as the Belgian national team has risen up to their *Golden Generation* in the meantime, more than five-folding its total squad value in just one decade (Riddell 2021). This led to twice as many players leaving the Belgian league for huge transfer fees, improving the clubs' financial situations. The sporting success cannot only be explained due to their youth work focus but also their immense competitive advantage in innovative technologies, just recently highlighted by league CEO Lorin Parys: "if you're not the biggest, you have to try to be the smartest" (Sportian 2024). However, the example of the Belgium football league also highlights a further factor, which influences the success of football leagues: the government. As a Deloitte report shows, a new tax regulation led to an 21% increase in tax costs within just one year (Deloitte 2023b). This shows that determinants for league success always depend on the environment and can vary significantly. Fixed factors such as the population size, existing infrastructure, or geographic location must be taken into account.

### **2.4.5 Development of Technological Innovation in Football**

To be able to further assess long-term success factors in football it is important to understand the recent developments of the industry. The literature underlines that constant development, progress, and innovation play an essential role in shaping sports and enhancing competitiveness (Ratten 2020; Tjønndal 2016; Ringuet-Riot, Hahn, and James 2013). Within the last decade, the game of football as well as the industry itself have undergone drastic changes through the implementation

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of innovative technologies. Technological innovations have become more prominent and have become a crucial factor in staying internationally competitive (Ratten 2020). Using innovations helps leagues to maximize the possible sporting outcome. Leveraging *first mover* advantages through the early development or adoption of new technologies enables leagues and stakeholders to secure a significant and unique competitive edge (Ringuet-Riot and James 2013). The discovery and development of talented, young players has become an extremely crucial factors of long-term success since they give leagues high financial gains and an increased reputation (Sæther and Solberg 2015). To find new talents, clubs within a league using software and data analytics to assess young players (Tuyls et al. 2021). Digitalization and the availability of such data enable talent scouts to operate without being limited by geographic boundaries. Additionally, there is a growing investment in junior performance centers equipped with cutting-edge technology for performance optimization (Sæther and Solberg 2015).

In the past, other decision-aid technologies have been introduced such as in-game headsets for referees, vanishing spray, goal line technology, or the *Video Assistant Referee (VAR)* (Holder, Ehrmann, and König 2022; FIFA 2019). Leagues must carefully evaluate which technologies and innovations to use in their competitions, weighting advantages and disadvantages and considering fan opinions. For instance, Sweden's top league chose not to implement *VAR*, prioritizing fan opinions (Kristiansson and Rapp 2024). Nowadays, data science and *AI* is increasingly used within the industry as it allows to process and collect match and player data which can be used for game-preparation and individual training (Thakkar and Shah 2021). Additionally, leagues can use these technologies to enhance fan engagement, data-driven marketing, or improved broadcasting. Such technologies can help leagues increase efficiency and close the gap to the *big* leagues. In chapter 5 such best practices are explained and evaluated to highlight their advantage in the perspective of international competitiveness. While the literature offers detailed insights into multifaceted success

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factors and measuring in sports and football, many of the findings were made for *big* or occasionally *medium* leagues. This leaves a significant academic gap within *small* football leagues in all relevant fields. Therefore, this thesis explores the overarching RQ 1:

RQ 1: How can small European football leagues increase their attractiveness and competitiveness and therefore unlock their growth potential?

In addition, the literature highlighted two separate topics, which can serve as subordinate RQ, and resultingly support in answering the overarching RQ:

RQ 1.1: How can sports industry best practices be evaluated and applied to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of small European football leagues?

RQ 1.2: How can small European football leagues leverage innovation and technology to close the competitive gap to larger leagues while developing unique selling points to unlock their growth potential?

### **3 Methodology (Group Part)**

This section gives an overview over the research design and chosen methodology to accomplish this thesis' research goals. Afterwards, this chapter explains the data collection to answer the research questions, ethical considerations as well as validation procedure.

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

To investigate ways to improve the competitiveness and attractiveness of *small* European football leagues, this thesis employs an exploratory mixed-methods approach. The exploratory approach is applied due to the limited academic literature on the topic, enabling flexibility in exploring emerging issues while maintaining an open and adaptive research perspective (Swedberg 2020). A mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, was identified as most suitable for addressing the complex and underexplored nature of the topic. This approach combines

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theoretical insights with practical applicability, leveraging the complementary strengths of both methods, particularly in the strategic analysis of leagues (Almeida 2018). This thesis follows a typical benchmarking process to develop two essential models for practical application, analyze findings from literature and interviews, and provide recommendations. Benchmarking is a strategic tool for improving performance by comparing best practices. It provides a framework for self-assessment and drives efficiency and effectiveness (Camp 1989; Spendolini 1992; Bhutta and Huq 1999). Camp (1989) describes it as a versatile process, adaptable to a wide range of questions and challenges. The four primary forms of benchmarking are internal, functional, competitive, and generic benchmarking (Camp 1989; Boxwell 1994). This thesis primarily focuses on competitive and generic benchmarking to analyze market positioning and explore innovative, cross-industry solutions. Camp's (1989) benchmarking consists of four phases: (1) goal setting and preparation, (2) comparison, (3) analysis, and (4) implementation.

The preparation phase and comparison phase are completed in the *League Success Model*, further explained in sections 4.1 and 4.2. The analysis phase aims to highlight successful sports industry best practices in a structured way with the *Evaluation Framework* and *Playbook Model*, further explained in sections 4.3 and 4.4. Finally, the implementation phase is displayed in chapter 6 of this thesis and develops actionable recommendations based on identified best practices and includes unique league conditions. One vital consideration regarding this thesis' benchmarking is that Camp's (1989) benchmarking is usually done from the perspective of a specific firm, while this thesis rather takes a general stance and allows companies to ease their benchmarking process.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

#### **3.2.1 Primary Data**

Primary data collected in this thesis is solely qualitative in nature and was extracted from seven

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expert interviews. Interview partners were selected on purposive sampling with the ultimate research goal to implement insights from diverse perspectives and ensure a fit to research goals (Campbell et al. 2020). To find suitable experts, this thesis used inclusion criteria (Patino and Ferreira 2018). These were clearly defined, as interviewees needed at least one year of experience in the sports industry or research, needed to work in the sports industry or research in the past three years, and needed to be available for a verbal or written interview between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2024. Candidates were excluded despite fulfilling the criteria if they were not able to provide insights into one of the four research goals. Finally, selected interviewees included two academics on strategic sports management and stadium attendance, one professional football coach, one professional football scout, one professional football agent, one expert on sports marketing and fan engagement, and one sports innovation and technology expert. A detailed list of all interviewees is displayed in Appx. 6. Four interviews were conducted via *Microsoft Teams* as semi-structured, verbal interviews, as those align best with an exploratory research approach (Brinkmann 2014). These interviews had pre-developed questionnaires but allowed the interviewer to derive from that to explore interesting insights mentioned by interviewees. Three candidates were unable to participate in verbal interviews. Therefore, this thesis also contains three written interviews, semi-structured in nature as well. Here, the interviewees were given a specific set of predetermined questions fitting to their expertise, but they were allowed to add or remove topics and interviewees were allowed to ask follow-up questions. Questionnaires were developed based on the four main research goals.

### **3.2.2 Secondary Data**

Secondary data, both quantitative and qualitative, was mainly extracted from academic literature of reputable journals. However, to guarantee practical feasibility and adequate recency, as requested by the thesis' partner *UEFA*, trustworthy non-academic sources were used to

complement academic sources (Booker 2021). Non-academic sources included national football associations and renowned business newspapers and were cross-checked with academic literature when possible. For academic literature, frequently cited papers were prioritized.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

As highlighted in the research approach, an exploratory approach was chosen. To support this method, primary qualitative data was systematically coded. The interview data analysis followed the principles of grounded theory, introduced by (Glaser and Strauss 2017), which aligns best with exploratory research. Through a process of open coding, interview transcripts were systematically analyzed to identify recurring ideas and patterns, leading to the development of categories and subcategories. The coding process was iterative, involving constant comparison between data segments and refining categories until a comprehensive framework of themes was established to ensure covering all relevant aspects of this under-researched topic (Glaser and Strauss 2017). The final coding scheme includes three categories, each split into several sub-categories. Details about the coding scheme can be found in Appx. 22. To provide full transparency of the interviews and allow for an objective review, full, uncoded transcripts are provided in this thesis' appendix. A collection of the coding schemes can be requested by contacting the authors.

Secondary quantitative data was mainly analyzed in the *League Success Model*, centering around key metrics related to league performance. The second model, the *Playbook Model*, was used to analyze primary and secondary qualitative data. It organizes, clusters, and rates sports industry best practices from interviews and literature. Both models will be further explained in chapter 4. All calculations and the modeling were conducted using *Microsoft Excel*. The qualitative data, sports industry best practices, derived from literature and interviews, were clustered into two subordinate research questions, which support in answering the overarching RQ. These two questions derived

from the literature in combination with the previously mentioned iterative review process. Two recurring topics were highlighted: *small* leagues can try to replicate successful leagues by applying some of their best practices or try to develop their own league-specific USPs. In the recommendations section, the validity and applicability of analyzed data and findings will be tested by creating a strategic plan based on one specific European football league.

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

All interview participants were briefed about the research nature and the topic in advance. All participants declared that their interview is allowed to be published in this thesis. Although participants consented to publication, anonymization was employed in case of sensitive insights. Participants were not informed about the thesis' connection to *UEFA* to avoid influencing responses or introducing bias. Input from the thesis' partner *UEFA* was limited to the expression of interest in topic areas and input on the development of this thesis' models. To ensure practical applicability of the models in *UEFA*'s work, the chosen weighting and exact model structure were discussed and aligned with *UEFA*. However, *UEFA* did not have any direct influence on content and findings of this thesis, therefore eliminating any conflict of interest.

### **3.5 Validation and Reliability**

To validate the data and enhance source reliability, a triangular approach regarding data and methods was used (Carter 2014). Triangulation ensured that findings were robust and credible by integrating perspectives from diverse stakeholders, secondary data, and quantitative analysis. First, this thesis used data sources from primary interviews combined with secondary qualitative data to validate findings. Additionally, the thesis combined qualitative insights with the development of two quantitative models to back key findings. While interview questions were not explicitly designed to minimize bias, the inclusion of stakeholders across academic, professional, and

industry domains helped mitigate potential biases inherent to individual perspectives. This methodology, combined with the models which will be introduced in chapter 4, not only fill a critical gap in academic literature on *small* European football leagues but also provides a practical tool for associations to strategize and enhance their competitiveness.

#### **4 Development of New Models for Small European Football Leagues (Group Part)**

Based on this thesis' literature review and identified academic research gaps, this section introduces two innovative models that not only address gaps in existing academic literature but also provide actionable tools for strategic decision-making within *small* European football leagues. The *League Success Model* introduces a new, multi-dimensional measure for league success. The *Playbook Model* evaluates and scores sports industry best practices to increase applicability provides guidance on how limited resources can be strategically allocated for maximum impact.

##### **4.1 League Success Model Derivation and Methodology**

After analyzing the existing literature circling around success in sports, section 2.3.2 highlighted that existing rankings mainly focus on one of two dimensions: the financial or the sporting perspective. Additionally, they usually only cover one of the two dimensions. This thesis encourages football associations to define success through a broader perspective and additionally include a societal dimension, particularly in terms of environmental and social sustainability, as well as enhancing fan engagement and commitment. Since the growing importance of the *TBL* approach, firms regularly look beyond financial performance and shareholder returns when assessing success (Elkington and Rowlands 1999).

As similar trends are not reflected in currently popular rankings for sports leagues, this thesis proposes a new model, the *League Success Model*. The model and its dimensions are derived from the literature review in chapter 2 and incorporate all relevant stakeholders and measures of success.

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It focuses on the first two steps of Camp's (1989) benchmarking process: the preparation and comparison phases. During the preparation phase, the benchmarking scope, criteria, sub-criteria, and overarching goal were defined. Data collection was solely qualitatively but included primary data through expert interviews as well as secondary data. The scope was designed to include enough leagues to enable meaningful comparisons, resulting in the selection of 21 out of 55 domestic *UEFA* leagues. As a reference point for success, the top eight leagues based on 2023/24 season *UEFA's country coefficient* were included, aligning with *UEFA's* preferences (UEFA 2024b). The selected 21 leagues represent diverse performance levels (*big, medium, and small*), ensuring a balanced analysis of success. In the selection process, data availability and reliability were key factors taken into account, which imposes certain bias.

The comparison phase, outlined by Camp (1989), involves data collection and weighting to enable accurate comparisons. For this study, data was exclusively sourced from secondary quantitative datasets, primarily drawn from non-academic sources to ensure the use of the most up-to-date information. Key sources included official football association websites, reports from leading consultancies, and reputable statistical websites. Each sub-criterion was quantified numerically, standardized using z-scores, and subsequently converted to a scale from 0 to 100 to facilitate comparability across the dataset (Nevil 2024). This process is explained in more detail in Appx. 7.

### **4.2 League Success Model Application and Purpose**

Building on existing literature and integrating currently popular rankings, such as the *UEFA country coefficient* or the RESPONSIBALL ranking, while accounting for recent trends in business success, the *League Success Model* encompasses three primary dimensions: sporting success, financial success, and societal success (Responsiball 2024; UEFA 2024b). Each dimension is further divided into sub-criteria, as illustrated in Figure 1. These criteria were developed based on

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a review of relevant literature, football’s principal revenue sources, key stakeholders, essential aspects of societal success in business and sports, and alignment with *UEFA*.

<b>Sporting Success</b>	<b>Financial Success</b>	<b>Societal Success</b>
International <i>UEFA</i> -titles	Average revenue per team	Match attendance
Market values of players	Broadcasting deals	Social media engagement
Youth development	Transfer surplus over past 3 years	Community & sustainability initiatives
Competitiveness of the league		
National team contribution		

*Figure 1: Sub-criteria for the League Success Model - a more detailed analysis is displayed in Appx. 7.*

Each criterion was weighted based on its relevance to football leagues and standardized as described in section 4.1. The standardized values were then multiplied by their respective weights to calculate scores, enabling the ranking of all leagues. To align with *UEFA*’s strategic objectives, weights were assigned to the overarching dimensions based on their explicit preferences as follows: 40% for sporting success, 35% for financial success, and 25% for societal success.

The *League Success Model* provides a novel, holistic approach to measure league success, extending beyond traditional methods. Its practical application is, particularly in strategic analysis, offering associations or leagues insights into their current standing and areas for future improvement. Additionally, associations can also identify peers by comparing their league to, for example, neighboring countries. In this thesis, the *League Success Model* serves two primary roles. First, its three dimensions, sporting, financial, and societal, form one part of the foundation for evaluating sports industry best practices within the second model, the *Playbook Model*. Second the *League Success Model* is vital in selecting a specific league for the recommendation section, assessing the league’s current position and situation before applying the findings from the discussion. Even though the model is only applied to men’s European football leagues in this thesis, the model’s groundwork is widely applicable and could be used for a variety of international sports leagues. The *League Success Model* can be accessed in a protected version under this [link](#) and the results in Appx. 8. A copy without restrictions can be requested by contacting the authors.

## **5 RQ 1.2: How can Small European Football Leagues Leverage Innovation and Technology to Close the Competitive Gap to Larger Leagues While Developing Unique Selling Points to Unlock Their Growth Potential? (Justus Anton Pranger)**

### **5.1 Challenges Need for Innovation in the Current Football Market**

*Small* leagues often face significant challenges in the market due to the high competition and saturation of larger clubs and successful leagues. In most cases, *small* leagues and their clubs have fewer financial resources available compared to *big* leagues. “Challenges with smaller budgets are clearly noticeable” (Pille, Interview 4). Resultingly, individual clubs are not able to invest as much into new technologies or players. Moreover, they need to deal with reduced media attention and sponsorships, which constrain their popularity and growth potential. Breaking out of this negative spiral is difficult due to the financial barriers and other limiting factors such as population size or the existing infrastructure. While it might be tempting to solely replicate best practices of major leagues, *small* leagues should “not only try and replicate what the big five, six leagues in the world do because there's certainly not a one-size-fits-all approach” (O’Neill, Interview 5). Leagues must understand that such an approach may not always align with their unique contexts. Nevertheless, these challenges also present opportunities to create a *USP* for its stakeholders by innovation. It is “really important [that leagues] [...] establish their own brand DNA, [...] building the strategy around their uniqueness, [...] because they offer something new, something different, but on the smaller end of the scale” (O’Neill, Interview 5). To overcome the challenges, leagues can use a variety of innovative technologies to gain a significant competitive advantage compared to similar leagues. “In terms of agility and speed, [*smaller* leagues] can certainly make up for a lot” (Ostieker, Interview 6), which they should use to their advantage. Further, *small* leagues should identify and leverage distinctive, league specific advantages and strategies to foster growth.

By analyzing technological trends, investigating successful innovative and unique best practices, and drawing insights from interviews with industry experts, the next chapter will provide actionable recommendations that can be applied by *small* leagues to reduce the gap to the top leagues and to create their own unique identity. Hereby the focus will be on the sporting, financial, and societal dimensions to align with the *League Success Model* presented in chapter 4. Ultimately, understanding and capitalizing on distinct technologies and advantages can empower *small* leagues to not only survive but thrive in the competitive industry.

### **5.1.1 Technological Innovations to Enhance Sporting Success**

The rapid development and invention of new technologies in recent years plays a crucial role in professionalism, international visibility, and sporting success of *small* leagues, allowing to close the gap to the *Big Five* leagues. New tools and devices allow to use new training methodologies, in-game analytics, injury prevention, and player performance optimization to foster success. Throughout the game, an immense amount of data such as the ball possession, passes, or covered distance is collected, which can be used to constantly improve sporting performance (Ćwiklinski, Gielczyk, and Choraś 2021). Effective use of data and technology enables greater competitiveness, credibility, and attractiveness in global markets as the quality of play increases. The fact that advanced “technologies will get more affordable in the future” (Ostieker, Interview 6) reduces potential financial barriers for *small* leagues, making it conceivable in the first place.

Resultingly, one area of development is the integration of wearable performance trackers across teams. Various physical and wearable technologies, including smartwatches, smart shoes, and GPS transponders, can be utilized to gather data on a player, such as their positioning, running speed, passes, and distance covered (Mataruna-Dos-Santos et al. 2020). These devices provide real-time data on player health, fatigue levels, and performance metrics, enabling clubs to optimize player fitness and reduce injuries. Such data has become significantly more important due to the

increasing number of games per year and helps to improve squads' balance as well as individual longevity of players which already has been proven within European top leagues (Sekin, Ateş, and Sekin 2023). Furthermore, advanced tools such as *Hudl* and *Wyscout* offer in-depth game analysis, allowing *small* leagues with limited financial resources to compete on a strategic level with wealthier and more developed leagues.

Taking this even a step further with *Machine Learning (ML)* and *AI* (further explained in Appx. 15), clubs will be able to analyze potential outcomes of various in-game scenarios. This technology enables, for example, the prediction of how alternative decisions by players at specific moments might have influenced the outcome, providing trainers with actionable insights to determine the optimal choices in real-time (Pille, Interview 4). Hereby, leagues could use centralized data repositories as an additional transformative measure which would streamline the collection and increase the amount of data. As mentioned in the interview with Ostsieker (Interview 6), individual leagues could take the role as a general service provider to enable access and combined financial as well as physical resources. This concept will be further explained in chapter 5.2.5.

Another technology that can help leagues to increase the sporting success is the investment into *Virtual Reality (VR)*. *Bundesliga* side *Borussia Dortmund* is a prominent example using this technology especially in their youth departments (Bate 2023). Leagues could provide first touchpoints to the technology or train staff with the usage of such technologies as this can bring several advantages to clubs and its performance. *VR* can especially improve training by offering immersive and repeatable experiences that simulate match-like scenarios. This allows players to practice decision-making and motor skills under conditions that closely mimic real-life scenarios while enhancing their understanding of spatial dynamics and tactical decisions without the physical demands and risks of on-field practice. This is especially beneficial for *small* leagues with limited access to extensive training facilities or competitive match environments (UE 2024). By integrating

*VR* into training regimes, *small* leagues can foster player development in a cost-effective manner, leveling the playing field with more resource-rich leagues (Faure et al. 2020).

For *small* leagues, nurturing and developing homegrown talent is often the only viable way to improve quality, as it provides a cost-effective alternative to acquiring established players. *AI*-driven talent identification platforms provide a significant advantage by analyzing vast datasets encompassing player performance statistics, physical attributes, and growth potential. Similar to other technologies, leagues can support clubs by providing access to such technologies and training for staff, enabling them to benefit from these advancements while minimizing implementation costs - often the biggest barrier for clubs with limited financial resources to experiment. The analysis of key metrics can be automated which enables clubs to expand their scouting network to underserved regions, often overlooked by larger leagues. Therefore, they can cultivate players who might not have opportunities in more prominent leagues, as they operate under reduced pressure and media scrutiny (Rahmani et al. 2024; Fyffe 2024). Schaefer mentioned that “*RB Salzburg* [for example] focus on signing players from Africa, a market that isn’t actively scouted by many German teams” (Interview 3). Overall, a data-driven approach enhances decision-making, improves resource efficiency, and ensures that talent development strategies yield measurable results regarding sporting success (Wei et al. 2021).

In addition to developing players, it is equally vital to invest in and support coaching staff, as they play a pivotal role in a team's sporting success. Strengthening the capabilities of coaching staff not only contributes to the success of individual teams but also enhances the overall performance of the league and its players. E-learning platforms, such as the *UEFA Academy Online*, have emerged as transformative tools, providing cost-effective and scalable solutions to enhance coaching skills. These updated coaching techniques ensure that coaching standards remain high, directly impacting player performance and leagues success. Further, such platforms could offer tailored modules on

modern tactics, training methodologies, player management, and leadership strategies, equipping coaches with the tools they need to make teams more successful (Perez-Camarero et al. 2022). E-learning platforms also allow flexible learning schedules, allowing coaches to balance their professional development with existing commitments. This flexibility is crucial for coaches in *smaller* leagues who may juggle multiple roles (Nath et al. 2024). The provision of those platforms could also fall into new league responsibilities, further explored in chapter 5.2.5.

### **5.1.2 Technological Innovations to Enhance Financial Success**

As highlighted in the literature review, clubs and leagues have increasingly adopted business-like practices in recent years, particularly in areas such as financial management or strategic planning. However, *small* football leagues still face challenges in ensuring financial sustainability and growth, especially compared to European top leagues. Limited budgets and resource constraints, due to lower revenue through TV rights, merchandising, or ticketing make it vital for *small* leagues to adopt cost-effective, innovative practices to sustain financial stability and growth.

One area of improvement can be the development and usage of new digital revenue streams. One opportunity *small* leagues can use is the creation of freemium content of clubs and matchdays, providing free highlights or behind-the-scenes content which can attract a larger audience. This is a common best practice in many industries with low entry barriers, as it helps convert a portion of users into paying subscribers, thereby boosting fan engagement and generating additional revenue (Wragg 2021). Additionally, leagues can implement and extend e-commerce platforms for merchandise sales to expand market reach and international visibility, enabling to capitalize on fan loyalty. Research demonstrates that e-commerce platforms, particularly those that use personalized recommendations, significantly increase fan engagement and merchandise sales (Rodrigues 2021). Leagues could also think about an own subscription-based streaming service (Ostsieker, Interview 6). This would require a lot of investment and effort by the league but would enable leagues to

broadcast live matches to local and international audiences at affordable rates, offering consistent, increased, and independent income while broadening their reach (PWC 2016).

Another factor can be the introduction of innovative advertising and sponsorship opportunities. Sponsors are critical revenue sources for football leagues and innovative approaches can unlock additional opportunities (Deloitte 2024a). *Small* leagues should focus on region-specific ads during broadcasts through virtual advertising. These are affordable and scalable solutions maximizing sponsorship income without requiring extensive physical set-up (Sportspromedia 2023). *La Liga*, for example, successfully used virtual advertising to cater to diverse international audiences (Sportspromedia 2019). This can also be optimized by dynamic sponsorship. This links sporting success metrics to the deal, offering *small* leagues the opportunity to engage local businesses. By providing data-driven insights into sponsorship effectiveness, leagues can negotiate more favorable deals. Studies further indicate that leveraging data analytics in sponsorship evaluation can enhance revenue by aligning sponsor interests with fan behavior (NielsenSports 2022).

Another opportunity is the use of micro-sponsorships which involves securing financial support from small businesses or individuals for specific elements of the club, such as player kits, corner flags, or matchday programs (Ostsieker, Interview 6). Building up on this, it can be coordinated by the league through the use of technological platforms that can facilitate these sponsorships by offering online portals where sponsors can select and fund specific assets or clubs directly and allows additional income while fostering community involvement and support.

New revenue streams can also be set up through the increase in fan engagement offerings. Mobile apps offering gamification, polls, and match predictions create experiences, encouraging fans to spend on in-app purchases (McHugh 2021). For instance, *Bundesliga* clubs have used gamified apps to engage fans during matchdays (Bundesliga 2024). Crowd initiatives, such as allowing fans to vote on jersey designs, generate extra revenue while cultivating a sense of community. Further,

platforms like *Socios* demonstrate how fan token ecosystems can provide exclusive rewards, while creating additional revenue (NielsenSports 2022). To overcome financial barriers, *small* leagues could collaborate with startups to secure early and free access to new services or products, in exchange for providing startups the opportunity to test innovations in a practical setting away from the big spotlight but with a respectable sample size (Ostsieker, Interview 6).

Besides all the large technological changes, which go far beyond those mentioned above, *small* leagues should not neglect incremental but simple technologies such as the implementation of contactless pay. This provides financial benefits to the *small* league as it delivers an affordable, scalable solution to maximize matchday revenues. With proven benefits in both consumer psychology and operational efficiency, contactless systems are a low-risk, high-reward investment. Research has shown that contactless payment systems increase the willingness to pay, the frequency of purchases, and fan’s likelihood of spontaneous purchases (Trutsch 2014).

### **5.1.3 Technological Innovations to Enhance Societal Success**

As highlighted in the *League Success Model* (chapter 4), societal dimensions are becoming increasingly significant to stakeholders and leagues in addition to sporting and financial success dimensions. *Small* leagues have the potential to grow and set themselves apart from other leagues by embracing innovative, cost-effective strategies that enhance their societal impact, fan involvement, and sustainability. By focusing societal best practices these leagues can redefine their competitive edge. Today, leagues must adapt to the growing importance of fan-centric approaches that prioritize engagement, inclusivity, and sustainability.

A league centralized approach and strategy to boost overall matchday attendance across the league could present one valuable opportunity to enhance the societal impact. This could be done through a centralized digital ticketing system organized by the league which can improve how fans purchase and manage tickets as well as allows to regulate the ticket resale market. Furthermore, a dynamic

price system can be implemented to increase ticket revenue while offering affordable options for younger audiences (Schreyer, Interview 1). Resultingly, clubs do not have to take care of this while at the same time can benefit from several advantages. For the fans, these platforms simplify the ticket-buying process, reduce fraudulent sales, and enhance accessibility. At the same time, these systems enable leagues to analyze ticketing data in real time, providing insights to individual clubs to adjust promotional strategies and pricing, as already used in the *NFL* (Popke 2018; SportsVenue 2024). Moreover, clubs could offer season passes through these platforms with financial and non-financial incentives for fans to attend multiple matches, increasing commitment. Programs like the *Major League Soccer's (MLS) Season Ticket Member* initiative, as exemplified by *LA Galaxy*, provide exclusive benefits, such as early access to tickets for playoffs or international matches, thereby adding value to the fan experience (LA Galaxy 2024). The Swedish *Allsvenskan* league has also introduced *Season Away Tickets* allowing fans to secure their spot for all away matches (SvenskelitFotboll 2024). To further support local communities and social engagement Ostsieker (Interview 6) mentioned that such platforms can also function as white-label job platforms where local firms can promote themselves and open job positions to create further publicity while having a positive societal impact on the league's community.

Another key lever is increasing overall fan memberships and fan engagement, which not only generates consistent revenue streams but also potentially drives higher matchday attendance. This can be achieved by offering unique benefits that incentivize fans to purchase such memberships. For instance, implementing a league-wide comprehensive loyalty program or league membership across all clubs allows to standardize fan engagement efforts and deliver consistent, attractive rewards to members, fostering stronger connections and increased participation. Such programs can reward fans for their support through points systems, exclusive merchandise, or priority access to events as implemented by the *NBA* (Feldman 2022). Research indicates that well-structured

loyalty programs can significantly deepen fan connection to the league while increasing the perceived value and fan retention (Anagnostou and Tzetzis 2021; Yi and Jeon 2003). Additionally, leagues could provide exclusive digital content such as behind-the-scenes footage, interviews, and interactive experiences accessible only to members as this can significantly enhance their engagement and sense of belonging. Maderer and Holtbrugge (2019) have shown that exclusive content can strengthen fans' identification with the league and its teams. A prominent example is the *Netflix* series *Drive to Survive* about *FI*. 34% of the fans mentioned they became a fan of the sport after watching the series (Statista 2022). Leagues can also organize league-branded community events such as fan festivals, charity matches, and local meet-and-greets, providing opportunities for direct interaction. U.S. sports, particularly *MLS*, serve as a successful example of excellence in engaging fans through community-focused initiatives (MLS n.d.).

To help clubs in *small* leagues with limited financial resources overcome potential financial barriers, leagues can offer access to shared social media resources. Hereby leagues can supply standardized templates, graphics, and promotional materials that align with broader league campaigns which maintains consistency while allowing creative flexibility at the same time. This approach not only reduces costs for individual clubs but also ensures consistent messaging and branding across the league increasing a combined brand identity. Furthermore, leagues can provide training sessions for club social media managers, helping them leverage emerging platforms and analytics tools effectively. For leagues it is also crucial to adapt their content to shifting demographics and evolving fan preferences as those are the fans of tomorrow (Schreyer, Interview 1). Interactivity, content personalization, as well as convenience and simplicity are increasingly important to young fans (Deloitte 2023a). It also showcases that 90% of *Gen Z* fans use social media to follow sports, with platforms like *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *Snapchat* dominating their

preferences (Dixon 2023). Short-form, visually engaging content such as highlight reels, memes, and behind-the-scenes clips resonates most with this audience (Jones 2022).

#### **5.1.4 Development of Leagues USP’s and Redefining the Role of a League**

Implementing the mentioned sporting, financial, and societal measures allows to sustainably increase success and international competitiveness in the modern sports industry. By focusing on areas such as talent development, unique operational models, and audience engagement, leagues can strengthen their appeal to national as well as international sponsors, investors, broadcasters, and fans. These approaches not only enhance increased financial resources for the league as well as its individual clubs but also paves the way for reinvestment in critical areas such as infrastructure, player acquisition, and further advanced technologies (Breitenreiter, Interview 2). These elements collectively drive continuous improvement long-term vision within a league.

Historically, leagues have functioned primarily as regulatory bodies, overseeing rules and ensuring fair play. However, as mentioned earlier, Ostsieker explained, proactively *small* “leagues should try to roll out [...] innovations as a service provider to its clubs” (Interview 6). By acting as a centralized entity for resources and services, leagues can enable clubs to access advanced technologies, training platforms, or analytics tools that would otherwise be financially inaccessible. Resultingly, individual clubs can benefit from advantages such as the ability to benchmark *KPIs* within a comparable framework and enhanced opportunities for collaboration, while simultaneously reducing costs per club - an essential consideration that is often a limiting factor. This allows to gain a competitive advantage compared to similar sized leagues. Taking the previously mentioned best practice of using AI and ML as an example, leagues can provide and organize centralized data repository for leagues to collect data. This increases the technologies’ effectiveness as ML models increase in precision with higher data availability. Furthermore, leagues can adopt shared platforms for video and data analytics which can potentially improve

scouting and youth development outcomes, critical for long-term growth (Pille, Interview 4). Besides the collaboration within the league, this effect could also further be extended through the collaboration with other *small* leagues, for example within one geographical area like the Nordics. Although individual clubs might initially view such measures critically due to the competitive nature of the league, the long-term benefits - such as improved and increased competitive balance, international performance, and revenue streams - could outweigh these concerns. *F1* serves as a strong example, where shared access to critical data allows all teams to improve collectively, ultimately strengthening the entire competition (Inani et al. 2023).

To further strengthen their “own brand DNA [...] and uniqueness” (O’Neill, Interview 5) *small* leagues can implement additional strategies. They can start by implementing “supposedly soft dosages, where [they] don't upset anyone of the existing fan groups. Where [leagues] simply say: I'm trying harder to tell stories, [...] to develop personalities, and to support the clubs in the meantime” (Ostsieker, Interview 6). One example of uniqueness is the Swedish football league who has decided against the implementation of the *VAR*. Schreyer, expert on stadium attendance said that this for fans “has a value, the real, raw experience after a goal like that, without you knowing that someone could check again and change everything” (Interview 1) and imposes something unique. Emphasizing uniqueness gives *small* football leagues an edge by attracting international fans and increased media attention. Authentic narratives and distinctive identities resonate with audiences, driving growth. Unique positioning also appeals to sponsors seeking alignment with their values (Bodet et al. 2020). By focusing on what makes them special, leagues can grow sustainably while strengthening fan and community connections.

To build uniqueness, leagues can apply a variety of different best practices. As mentioned in section 5.1, one of the most effective strategies for *small* leagues is to position themselves as incubators of young talent. “Switzerland, Sweden or Croatia, for example, [...] see themselves as training

leagues that train talented young players to make them attractive for the top leagues in order to achieve high transfer revenues with them” (Breitenreiter, Interview 2). By prioritizing youth development and providing young players with significant playing time, these leagues can create a pipeline of skilled athletes who attract attention from larger leagues which further boosts the leagues visibility and reputation as talent hubs as well as earns them substantial revenue through transfer fees (Ryom et al. 2020). The spotlight of international competitions can serve as a platform to showcase the talents abilities to broader audiences, which can open pathways to career advancement, foster personal growth, and elevate their confidence in competitive scenarios. Furthermore, this balance ensures that players are not overwhelmed by high expectations early on, preserving their mental well-being while building the resilience needed to succeed in larger, more demanding arenas. Leagues can also “implement support structures like transition managers to help young players integrate better” (Schaf, Interview 3) which increased the likelihood of enabling the full potential of young international talents and resultingly their resale value.

Another unique factor could be to modify league regulations while ensuring they remain aligned with official *Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)* and *UEFA* standards. To increase the chances of signing new talents or better players *small* leagues can “[keep] their transfer windows open longer than the bigger leagues” (Schaf, Interview 3) as this enables the opportunity to attract players seeking new opportunities after the closure of larger markets. This flexibility also allows clubs to acquire quality players who might otherwise remain unattached, thereby enhancing team performance (Transfermarkt 2024b). A very prominent example in recent years is the loan-transfer of *Victor Osimhen* (market value: €120M) to *Galatasaray S.K.* after the transfer window of top 5 leagues had closed (Transfermarkt 2024c). This shows that *small* leagues can adjust to market dynamics and player availability, allowing them to sign high-value players for a fraction of their worth through taking advantage of minor regulation changes.

*Small* leagues must remain realistic, recognizing their limited resources and acknowledge fixed circumstances, such as population size and *Gross Domestic Product (GDP)* per capita. “Small leagues will not be able to play at a level like the Champions League or something similar. [Resultingly,] the issue of identity through some kind of driver is important” (Schreyer, Interview 1). These leagues can set themselves apart from the *Big Five* leagues by modifying the traditional league format<sup>1</sup> and introducing unique formats such as innovative league formats or rule changes to increase differentiation, attract new fans and sponsors, and enhance marketability. One example is the introduction of a split-season format used in the Austrian *Bundesliga*. After 22 rounds, the top six teams compete for the title, while the bottom six fight to avoid relegation. Points from the regular season are halved, retaining competitiveness in both groups (OEFBL 2024). Similarly, the *MLS* playoff system is played in a knockout contest after the regular season, culminating in a final to crown the champion (MLS 2023). Another example is the introduction of relegation playoffs used in *Eredivisie* where playoffs determine promotion and relegation in a high-stakes series creating additional drama and fan interest surges in end-of-season games (Eredivisie 2024).

In conclusion and to answer the RQ1.1, *small* European football leagues can decrease the competitive gap with larger leagues by leveraging innovation and technology to build distinct value propositions. Technologies like wearable trackers, AI-driven talent identification, and *VR* training enhance player development and optimize team performance. Financial sustainability can be achieved through diverse revenue streams, including freemium content, and dynamic sponsorships, while enhancing fan engagement through digital platforms, unique league formats, and social campaigns strengthens loyalty and reach. Prioritizing societal impact and fostering community ties also positions leagues as inclusive and fan-centric entities. Centralizing resources and acting as

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<sup>1</sup> Teams playing each other home & away in a round-robin style, where the highest number of points at the end of the season determine the champion and the lowest 2/3 teams in the league are relegated to the lower league e.g. as the Bundesliga, Premiere League

service providers allow leagues to lower costs and improve clubs' access to advanced tools, thereby improving their sporting and financial success. By focusing on unique advantages such as agility and collaboration, *small* leagues can grow sustainably, attract international attention, and thrive in the competitive football ecosystem by highlighting their uniqueness. These strategies empower them to redefine their role and secure a meaningful position in the global sports landscape.

## **5.2 Limitations and Possible Future Research (Group Part)**

This study faced several methodological limitations, primarily related to data availability and scope constraints. Time and resource constraints limited the *League Success Model* to eleven sub-criteria, even though additional dimensions could have enhanced its accuracy. Accessing granular metrics such as profitability or club valuations for *smaller* European leagues was not possible, and some metrics therefore had to be excluded from the *League Success Model*. Further limitations and data gaps were mitigated by cross-checked secondary sources and using proxy metric. However, this reliance on indirect data may affect precision. The scope of the thesis focused exclusively on European football leagues, specifically the first divisions, and excluded women's football and non-European leagues due to *UEFA*-driven priorities and data limitations. These exclusions present opportunities to expand the model for greater inclusivity and applicability. Finally, findings from RQ 1.1 and 1.2 were applied to only one European country. While this allowed for a focused analysis, expanding the research to other leagues and sports globally could broaden the scope and allow for more detailed insights.

## **6 Conclusion (Group Part)**

This thesis examines how *small* European football leagues can enhance their attractiveness and competitiveness within the football industry through best practices, innovations, and strategic approaches. A comprehensive literature review reveals that the definition and measurement of

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success in the business context have evolved significantly in recent years, becoming increasingly multidimensional. However, this shift is not really reflected in contemporary measures of sports success, which remain dominated by traditional metrics focused on financial and sporting achievements. While some rankings have begun to incorporate societal dimensions, such as community engagement and sustainability, a holistic and comprehensive model has yet to emerge in academic literature. The literature review, combined with insights from seven expert interviews, identifies a significant academic research gap concerning *small* football leagues and inadequacies in current league success models. These models fail to account for the multidimensional nature of success, analogous to the *TBL* in business. To address this gap, this thesis develops two novel models designed to answer the prevailing research questions and provide a more comprehensive framework for league success measurement.

Based on these identified gaps, this thesis introduces the *League Success Model* to evaluate the sporting, financial, and societal success of sports leagues. This model enables leagues to measure, quantify, and compare their performance using selected *KPIs*, while assessing how strategic initiatives impact overall success in an international context. To complement this, the *Playbook Model* was created to analyze the detailed impact of sports industry best practices of successful leagues and clubs. It categorizes and scores strategic initiatives gathered from interviews and literature, organizing them into a four-quadrant scheme based on their influence on stakeholders and their possible impact on the *League Success Model* dimensions. Together, these models equip leagues with practical tools to measure progress, identify areas for improvement, and implement strategies tailored to their unique contexts. Grounded in both qualitative and quantitative research, the models go beyond theoretical constructs to offer adaptable frameworks that address the overarching research question. While the *League Success Model* and *Playbook Model* provide significant practical importance, their true value lies in their adaptability to various scenarios and

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preferences. By allowing stakeholders to adjust weights, criteria, and objectives, these models empower leagues to create and plan their own paths to success. At the same time, the research underscores the presence of commonalities across all leagues. The three strategic pillars of sporting, financial, and societal success offer universal benchmarks that all leagues can use to measure progress and track development. These pillars not only provide a shared framework for evaluation but also serve as a guide for identifying opportunities and addressing gaps. By building on these commonalities, leagues can create a balance between individual adaptation and universal best practices, fostering an inclusive and competitive football ecosystem.

Several best practices emerged as possible success drivers for *small* European football leagues. Exemplary for these is the importance of robust youth development programs, which not only cultivate homegrown talent but also provide financial benefits through transfer revenues, as exemplified by the Portuguese league. Moreover, innovative league formats, such as playoffs or entertainment-focused events, are identified as effective in capturing the attention of younger audiences and boosting fan engagement. The *Kings League*, with its blend of traditional football rules and entertainment elements, illustrates how creative approaches can differentiate *small* leagues in a crowded market, despite limited sporting success. Similarly, technological advancements, such as data analytics and AI-driven tools, present opportunities for *small* leagues to optimize player performance, improve fan experiences, and international visibility, often at a fraction of the cost required by larger league. Additionally, new technologies and innovative community as well as environmental initiatives are essential to foster societal success. Initiatives such a centralized ticketing or a white-label job platform foster fan engagement and societal impact. The thesis also highlights the potentially evolving role of leagues acting as an innovation driver and service provider to their clubs. By streamlining functions such as social media, data analytics, and technological innovation, leagues can increase their collective impact while reducing cost and

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time investments for individual clubs, often significant burdens. This shift not only strengthens the league's overall structure, visibility, and engagement but also positions it as a proactive driver of growth and innovation. Additionally, leagues can get access to technological licenses, which would be impossible to acquire for individual clubs, boosting sporting quality.

However, the success of strategic initiatives relies on a delicate balance between quick, impactful changes and sustainable, long-term transformations. Short-term improvements, such as social media campaigns and targeted events, provide immediate visibility and fan engagement, while long-term investments in youth academies, sustainability initiatives, and strategic partnerships ensure financial stability and sporting growth over time. Integrating community-focused programs and leveraging strategic collaborations with global leagues or organizations, for instance, can significantly boost a league's market position and stakeholder trust. Despite the broad applicability of the models and strategies presented, this research emphasizes that there is no *one-size-fits-all* solution for *small* leagues. Each league operates within a distinct context shaped by its fan base, organizational structure, and external environment. This individuality necessitates a tailored approach, where leagues identify and prioritize strategies that align with their specific goals and challenges. To demonstrate the practical applicability of the best practices, they were exemplarily applied to the Swedish football league *Allsvenskan*. This application showcased how the *League Success Model* can be tailored to address the specific challenges and opportunities of an individual league, revealing that *Allsvenskan* excels in the societal dimension but underperforms in sporting success. Guided by the *Playbook Model*, this thesis proposed seven key pillars for Allsvenskan's future strategy, encompassing both quick-win best practices and long-term league transformations. While the potential impact of implementing these initiatives is significant, external factors such as population size, infrastructure, and other fixed constraints must be acknowledged as limitations to growth. While this thesis provides significant practical value, this thesis applied its findings only

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on men's European football. Women's football and different sports or geographical areas remain under-researched when specifying in league development and offer immense potential for future research.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that *small* European football leagues can significantly enhance their competitiveness and attractiveness by adopting a strategic, multidimensional approach. The *League Success Model* and *Playbook Model* serve as effective tools that guide leagues in defining success, implementing effective strategies, and measuring progress. Through the integration of short-term wins and long-term investments, *small* European football leagues can position themselves as dynamic, innovative entities within the football landscape. By embracing their unique contexts while leveraging shared best practices, these leagues can not only survive but thrive, contributing to a more balanced and inclusive European football ecosystem. This work not only fills a critical gap in academic literature but also provides practical insights for league administrators, stakeholders, and especially our partner *UEFA*, and offers a clear roadmap for sustainable league growth.

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**Appendix 01: UEFA Country Coefficient**

The *UEFA country coefficient* is a ranking system used by the *UEFA* to evaluate and rank the performance of member countries' clubs in European competitions over a five-year period. Points are awarded based on the results of clubs in the *UEFA* Champions League, Europa League, and Europa Conference League, with bonuses for reaching advanced stages. The total points earned by a country's clubs are divided by the number of participating teams to calculate the *UEFA country coefficient*. These rankings determine the allocation of spots for clubs in *UEFA* competitions and influence seeding during draws (UEFA 2024b).

**Current standing:**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Points</b>
1	England	94874
2	Italy	83106
3	Spain	77846
4	Germany	74410
5	France	61522
6	Netherlands	57900
7	Portugal	55016
8	Belgium	50600
9	Czechia	41050
10	Türkiye	40700
11	Norway	34000
12	Greece	33750
13	Denmark	32075
14	Israel	31625
15	Austria	31200
16	Scotland	31100
17	Switzerland	30975
18	Poland	30375
19	Croatia	25025
20	Cyprus	23975

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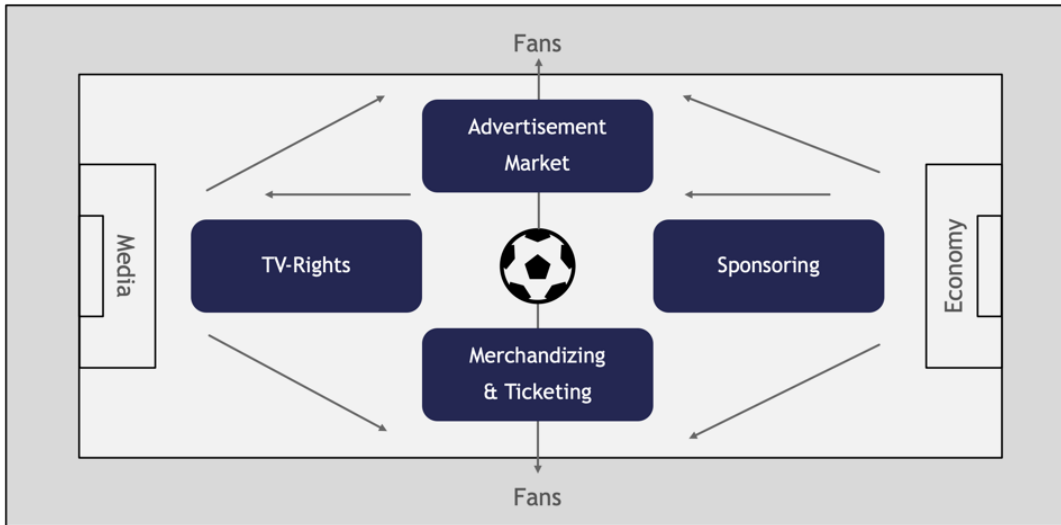
21	Sweden	23750
22	Serbia	23475
23	Hungary	22500
24	Ukraine	22200
25	Romania	20625
26	Slovakia	19750
27	Bulgaria	19625
28	Azerbaijan	19625
29	Russia	18299
30	Slovenia	17125
31	Moldova	14250
32	Republic of Ireland	14000
33	Iceland	12583
34	Armenia	12250
35	Kosovo	12041
36	Latvia	11705
37	Finland	11750
38	Bosnia and Herzegovina	11500
39	Kazakhstan	10875
40	Faroe Islands	10750
41	Malta	8500
42	Lithuania	8250
43	Liechtenstein	8000
44	Estonia	7957
45	Albania	7875
46	Northern Ireland	7833
47	Montenegro	7208
48	Luxembourg	6875
49	Wales	6791
50	Georgia	6625
51	North Macedonia	6166
52	Belarus	6000
53	Andorra	5498
54	Gibraltar	5457
55	San Marino	2498

Appendix 02: SPLISS Model



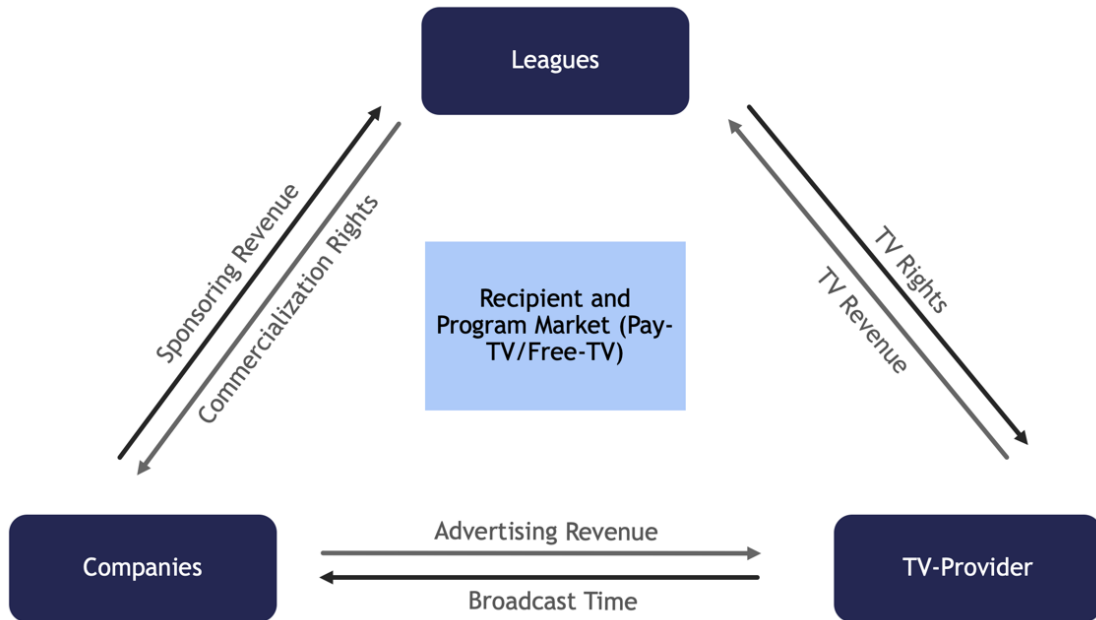
De Bosscher et al. (2016)

**Appendix 03: The Football Network: Markets and Stakeholders in Interaction**



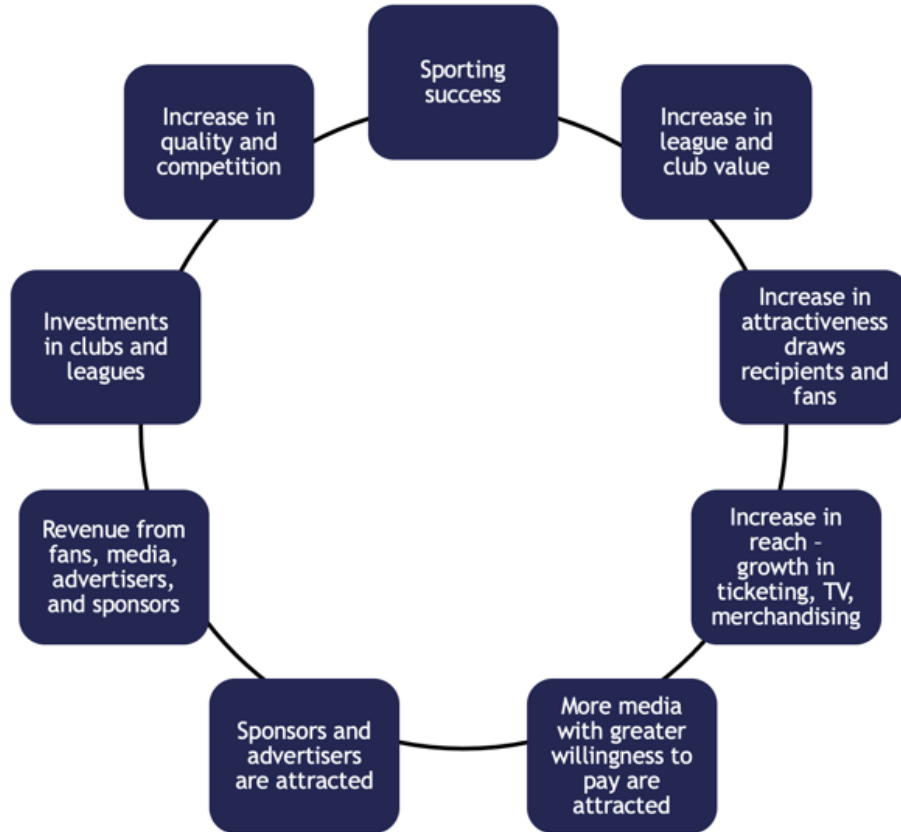
Own Representation Based on Vöpel and Steinhardt (2008)

**Appendix 04: Interdependencies Among Key Stakeholders in the Football Ecosystem**



Own Representation Based on Vöpel and Steinhardt (2008)

**Appendix 05: The Value Creation Cycle in Football: Factors and Interdependencies**



Own Representation Based on Vöpel and Steinhardt (2008) and Dietl, Franck, and Lang (2008)

**Appendix 06: Detailed List of all Interview Partners**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Dominik Schreyer</b>	Dominik Schreyer is an apl. Professor of Sports Economics at WHU – Otto Beisheim School. His research focuses on the sociopsychological factors influencing economic decision-making, with particular emphasis on stadium attendance demand and no-show behavior among football fans, especially season ticket holders. Schreyer has an extensive academic background, having published over 40 peer-reviewed articles, and frequently shares insights on sports economics and fan behavior.
<b>André Breitenreiter</b>	André Breitenreiter is a renowned German football coach. Breitenreiter's diverse coaching career has exposed him to the competitive landscapes of international leagues, making him an ideal subject for exploring strategic differences between large and <i>small</i> leagues.
<b>Simon Schaef</b>	Simon Schaef is an assistant manager at a German player and coach agency, where he plays a pivotal role in scouting and talent identification. Focused on the top-talent segment aged 16-21, Schaef works to identify players relevant to the German market, either facilitating their transfer to Germany or signing them to the agency. His expertise in talent scouting and the intermediary role between players and clubs provides valuable insights into the dynamics of player representation and market strategies
<b>Joel Pille</b>	Joel Pille is the scouting coordinator for a German third-division football team. In his role, he manages and organizes the talent identification process,

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	balancing limited resources with the demands of competitive football. He has extensive insights into how <i>smaller</i> clubs navigate scouting challenges, prioritize players, and leverage innovative strategies to stay competitive in the market.
<b>James O’Neill</b>	James O’Neill is an expert in business development, strategic partnerships, and sports marketing. Having previously worked at 433, one of the largest and most influential football-focused social media platforms, O’Neill has significant experience in leveraging digital media for branding and fan engagement. Currently, he serves at VE2 Max, where he specializes in strategic partnerships and sports marketing.
<b>Philipp Ostsieker</b>	Philipp Ostsieker is a product manager and consultant (MBA) specializing in digital transformation for creative businesses. With a focus on implementing change, enhancing efficiency, and unlocking new business potential, he excels at navigating complex environments and aligning diverse stakeholders to achieve impactful outcomes.
<b>Martin Carlsson-Wall</b>	Martin Carlsson-Wall is a distinguished professor of sports management and the director of the Center for Sports & Business at the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), widely regarded as the leading business school in Sweden. With extensive expertise in sports management and a particular focus on the Swedish football ecosystem, Carlsson-Wall brings a deep understanding of the strategic and operational aspects of sports organizations in <i>smaller</i> leagues.

## Appendix 07: Sub-Criteria & Score Standardization of League Success Model

All sub-criteria and the weightings were discussed with *UEFA*, and finalized by them:

### **Sporting Success (Overall contribution: 40%)**

- **Market Value of Players (10%):** Another important measurement of the sporting quality is the total sum of players' market values to reflect also the quality of individual players. Additionally, Dominik Schreyer confirmed that it's a good indicator for attendance.
- **International Titles (7.5%):** The sporting quality on the pitch and how it translates into success in the games between different leagues is the single-most important indicator. However, this is represented twice in the model by international titles (to account for historic success) and competitiveness of the league. Therefore, international titles account for 7.5% of the overall score.
- **Competitiveness of the League (10%):** The competitiveness of the league is best measured by the *UEFA's country coefficient*, which includes all results of a domestic league's clubs in the *UEFA* competitions, are seen as the best indicator for sporting quality. It is also a very good indicator for the recent quality of the club, compared to the long-term view of international titles.
- **Youth Development (7.5%):** An essential part in assessing sporting quality is also how the teams are able to develop their youth players. The best indicator for this would be to assess how many players for each team come through their own youth talent program, however this data is not widely accessible. Therefore, the average age was trusted with that, knowing that it could also be improved by transfers at a young age. However, it was still considered a good indication for the integration of youth players.

- **National Team Contribution (5%):** Another essential point – from an association point of view – is the relation between a league and the contribution of the league to its own national team, as of course it is preferable to have the best players of your national team also in your domestic league. The most recent national team squads were assessed for this dimension (November 24)

Within the dimension of sporting quality, the model presents a strong comprehension of varying factors. However, especially the young talent factor could still be refined, assuming better data quality.

### **Financial Success (Overall Contribution: 35%)**

- **Revenue (15%):** The league's revenue is the most crucial perspective when talking about financial success of a league; As revenue generation is additionally key for league development, the highest individual rating were assigned to it. Sources were used from league's press releases. To account for different league sizes, the average revenue per team from the last season was used
- **Broadcasting Deals (10%):** Broadcasting revenue is of course already included in the revenue column. However, broadcasting deals specifically include the demand for a league and also is an estimation for total reach. As different sources displayed varying values, the values of the season 19/20 were used, as those offered the best comparability.
- **Surplus Transfer (10%):** As transfer surplus is an essential indicator for a league's financial stability, and the overall work (and youth development work) of the league, the total transfer balance of the past three years from all leagues from transfermarkt.de was used.

Those are the most crucial financial success indicators, which were identified. Potential additions, which were not feasible due to data accessibility issues were profitability, team valuations, and infrastructure. However, it was not possible to access comparable data for the majority of sampled leagues.

### **Societal Success (Overall Contribution: 25%)**

- **Community Impact & Sustainability (10%):** What is most underrepresented in current success measurement of leagues is the factor of *CSR*, including the responsibility of leagues regarding the social and environmental surrounding. However, as the topic gains more and more relevance, this should be represented accordingly in a holistic model. To capture this, this model trusted the rankings of RESPONSIBALL for most leagues, which assessed contribution to community programs and charity and to local economies, as well as environmental and sustainability initiatives. Due to lack of data accessibility, some leagues have an estimated score here.
- **Match Attendance (10%):** A vital perspective of engaging local communities is the act of bringing people physically to your stadium every week. Therefore, match attendance plays a high role, leads to immense attention beyond borders (exemplified by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bundesliga in recent years) and improves the opportunity for TV money or sponsorship revenue.
- **Social Media Engagement (5%):** For estimations of total reach, this model trusts the total social media follower count of each league. This is essential to track how many people actually engage with the league, are affected by it, and how sponsors can also perceive the importance of a league.

Within the dimension of societal success, data accessibility was a huge issue, as most additional factors, which would be useful, would have to be estimated based on *CSR* reports or similar. To do

so in a high-quality assessment, it would need a team of experts to allow for comparability. Additionally, data such as total reach, TV audience, or membership counts of the clubs/league was not publicly available, which would further improve the accuracy of the model.

To quantify the respective sub-criteria, publicly available data was utilized, as previously described, to populate the dataset for each country. To enable meaningful comparisons across leagues, the raw data for individual variables within each dimension were standardized into z-scores, as the variables varied in meaning and scale. Standardization ensured that each value is directly comparable, allowing for accurate weighting and interpretation. Prior to standardization, the minimum, maximum, and range for each set of variables was calculated. The z-scores were then computed for each individual value using the following formula (Nevil 2024):

Where:

$$X'_{ij} = \left[ \left( \frac{X_{ij} - \min_i}{R_i} \right) * 99 \right] + 1$$

$X'_{ij}$  is the scaled final value of league  $j$  on dimension for  $i$ ,

$X_{ij}$  is the average score of league  $j$  on dimension  $i$ ,

$\min_i$  is the minimum value for dimension  $i$ ,

$R_i$  is the range of dimension  $i$ .

For the variables with a reverse scale, where a low value was considered a better value than a high one (e.g. *UEFA country coefficient*), an inverse formula had to be used to be able to standardize the values accordingly:

$$X'_{ij} = \left[ \left( 1 - \frac{X_{ij} - \min_i}{R_i} \right) * 99 \right] + 1$$

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After the standardization of the data each value was multiplied by each respective weight as previously outlined. The most critical variables were assigned weights ranging from 10% to 15%, while less significant variables were weighted between 5% and 7.5%. These weights are flexible, allowing for adjustments based on a league's specific circumstances, strategic objectives, and preferences. To calculate the final score for each country, the assigned weight for each variable was multiplied by its respective standardized value, and the results were aggregated (Nevil 2024).

**Appendix 08: Results of League Success Model**

**Link to Excel:** [SharePoint](#)

Sheet: *Evaluation Framework*

Overall Ranking				
UEFA Ranking:	Rank	Score:	Country:	Difference to UEFA:
1 England	1	80.81	England	0
2 Italy	2	67.80	Spain	1
3 Spain	3	66.34	Germany	1
4 Germany	4	55.59	Italy	-2
5 France	5	42.85	Netherlands	1
6 Netherlands	6	42.53	France	-1
7 Portugal	7	35.24	Belgium	1
8 Belgium	8	35.17	Denmark	2
9 Norway	9	33.94	Sweden	5
10 Denmark	10	32.60	Portugal	-3
11 Austria	11	31.35	Austria	0
12 Switzerland	12	31.20	Switzerland	0
13 Poland	13	28.45	Poland	0
14 Sweden	14	28.17	Norway	-5
15 Hungary	15	26.02	Finland	2
16 Iceland	16	23.99	Iceland	0
17 Finland	17	22.43	Hungary	-2
18 Malta	18	20.95	Lithuania	1
19 Lithuania	19	20.90	Northern Ireland	1
20 Northern Ireland	20	18.87	Malta	-2
21 Wales	21	17.96	Wales	0

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This can also be subdivided to the individual components of the *Leagues Success Model*:

Financial Ranking			
Rank:	Score:	Country:	Difference to UEFA:
1	25.10	England	0
2	25.06	Spain	1
3	22.81	Germany	1
4	16.62	Italy	-2
5	13.86	France	0
6	12.17	Portugal	1
7	11.73	Belgium	1
8	11.10	Netherlands	-2
9	9.31	Switzerland	3
10	9.23	Austria	1
11	9.07	Sweden	3
12	8.97	Denmark	-2
13	8.73	Poland	0
14	8.67	Norway	-5
15	8.41	Hungary	0
16	8.16	Finland	1
17	7.88	Lithuania	2
18	7.88	Wales	3
19	7.83	Iceland	-3
20	7.82	Northern Ireland	0
21	7.76	Malta	-3

Sporting Ranking			
Rank:	Score:	Country:	Difference to UEFA:
1	32.32	England	0
2	26.21	Italy	0
3	25.95	Spain	0
4	23.05	Germany	0
5	21.29	Netherlands	1
6	20.08	France	-1
7	17.62	Belgium	1
8	16.99	Portugal	-1
9	16.44	Austria	2
10	15.10	Denmark	0
11	14.18	Norway	-2
12	14.15	Switzerland	0
13	13.39	Poland	0
14	13.33	Sweden	0
15	10.91	Hungary	0
16	10.07	Finland	1
17	8.85	Iceland	-1
18	8.68	Wales	3
19	8.37	Lithuania	0
20	8.14	Northern Ireland	0
21	7.46	Malta	-3

Societal ranking			
Rank:	Score:	Country:	Difference to UEFA:
1	23.39	England	0
2	20.49	Germany	2
3	16.80	Spain	0
4	12.76	Italy	-2
5	11.54	Sweden	9
6	11.09	Denmark	4
7	10.46	Netherlands	-1
8	8.59	France	-3
9	7.79	Finland	8
10	7.73	Switzerland	2
11	7.31	Iceland	5
12	6.33	Poland	1
13	5.89	Belgium	-5
14	5.68	Austria	-3
15	5.32	Norway	-6
16	4.94	Northern Ireland	4
17	4.70	Lithuania	2
18	3.64	Malta	0
19	3.44	Portugal	-12
20	3.11	Hungary	-5
21	1.40	Wales	0

## **Appendix 15: Machine Learning & Artificial Intelligence Introduction**

Machine Learning (ML), a subset of Artificial Intelligence, is defined by El Naqa and Murphy (2015) as “an evolving branch of computational algorithms that are designed to emulate human intelligence by learning from the surrounding environment”. These algorithms leverage data inputs to continually evolve and are applied across various fields, including pattern recognition, finance, medical applications, and computer vision (El Naqa and Murphy 2015). ML can be categorized into three main types: supervised learning, unsupervised learning, and reinforcement learning (Carleo et al. 2019; Herold et al. 2019).

**Supervised learning** utilizes labeled data to train models to achieve specific outputs, such as classifying data or accurately predicting future outcomes (Carleo et al. 2019; Herold et al. 2019). Known input is therefore simply matched to a fixed output. An example would be the approach of Wei et al. (2013) who mapped the player's movements with the help of a decision tree for different phases of the game. Predefined parameters such as shots, free kicks, or tackles were classified and sorted with the help of the technology.

**Unsupervised learning**, on the other hand, works with unlabeled data (i.e., no predefined output variables). It identifies patterns, clusters, and unknown structures within the data to reveal correlations (Carleo et al. 2019; Herold et al. 2019). These findings can then be associated with objects, actions, or other groupings. In football, for example, Bialkowski et al. (2014) used this technique to determine a player’s role within a team’s formation. Different positions, such as strikers or goalkeepers, produce distinctive data based on their tasks during a game, allowing these roles to be grouped and identified.

**Reinforcement learning** is a reward-based, self-learning algorithm that encourages specific behaviors. Through trial and error, the model refines its decision-making process by receiving

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feedback in the form of rewards or penalties (Sutton and Barto 2018; Carleo et al. 2019). Incorrect decisions give feedback that helps the algorithm learn from its mistakes, improving its performance over time by building on experience.

### **Interview 1: Dominik Schreyer**

Dominik Schreyer is an apl. Professor of Sports Economics at WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management in Düsseldorf and serves as the Director of the Center for Sports and Management (CSM). His research focuses on the sociopsychological factors influencing economic decision-making, with particular emphasis on stadium attendance demand and no-show behavior among football fans, especially season ticket holders. Schreyer has an extensive academic background, having published over 40 peer-reviewed articles, and frequently shares insights on sports economics and fan behavior.

The interview was via Microsoft Teams and conducted in German, his native language, to ensure clarity and accuracy of his insights, minimizing the risk of information loss due to translation. On request, an English transcript can be provided.

#### **Schreyer, Dominik - 00:00**

Ich quäle mich aus dem Bett, außerdem nach zwei Tagen.

Ich muss mal gucken, ob meine Stimme durchhält.

Ehrlich gesagt, ich trinke immer mal ein bisschen Kaffee, aber ich hoffe, dass das jetzt nicht so sehr stört.

Und ich muss sagen, ich bin nur so lala.

Ich habe einmal ganz kurz durch die Fragen geguckt.

Ich bin nur so halb vorbereitet, aber wir gucken mal, wie weit wir kommen.

Machen wir das systematisch?

Gehen wir jetzt Frage für Frage durch oder wie ist das?

Beziehungsweise erstmal hallo, Holt mich mal ab.

**Tim Schaaf - 00:29**

So, erstmal vielen, vielen Dank, dass du heute da bist.

Weiterhin schon mal gute Besserung.

Wirklich, also großes Dankeschön.

Wir sind dir sehr dankbar.

Genau, wir sind Tim und Justus, beide Bachelor WHU.

Beide auch unsere Bachelorarbeit bei dir am Chair bei Dominik Geissler geschrieben damals und sind jetzt an der Nova und schreiben eben unsere Masterthesis auch wieder über

Sportmanagement und zwar über das Development der Attractiveness und Competitiveness von kleinen ersten Ligen in Europa.

Aber klein definiert sich jetzt hier nicht wie Portugal, Schweiz, Österreich, sondern eher Schweden, Albanien, Georgien, die Region quasi.

Und da soll eben das Thema Fan Engagement, Attendance, Brand Strategy und so weiter auch eine große Rolle spielen.

Und so haben wir an dich gedacht.

Genau, deswegen sind wir heute hier.

Den Leitfaden, an dem würde ich mich orientieren.

Ich würde jetzt auch damit reinkommen.

Wenn ich dann aber irgendwann sehe, dass wir so ein bisschen, wenn du in den Antworten ein neues Thema aufmachst und das auch noch irgendwo anders steht, dann würde ich das einfach dann damit aufgreifen.

Dass du noch nicht so viel reingucken konntest, ist wirklich gar kein Problem.

Ich denke, vieles davon befasst du dich sowieso tagtäglich mit und dementsprechend sollte das gut passen.

**Schreyer, Dominik - 02:00**

Super, so machen wir das.

**Tim Schaaf – 02:03**

Perfekt.

Das Vierte in den Meetings ist übrigens unser AI-Bot für Transkribierungen.

Ich hoffe, dass sich das nicht stört.

Aber das spart schon deutlich Zeit.

**Schreyer, Dominik - 02:15**

Das glaube ich wohl.

Das glaube ich wohl.

Ich finde das interessant eben vielleicht mal vorneweg, weil in der Forschung ... Warst du in meinem Seminar?

**Tim Schaaf - 02:28**

In dem Sustainability-Seminar?

**Schreyer, Dominik - 02:33**

Ne das andere. Ich habe jedes Jahr einen Seminar in Sportökonomie und einst in Sustainability.

Sustainability hast du gemacht, ne?

**Tim Schaaf - 02:40**

Sustainability haben wir beide gemacht, ja. Das andere war da nicht.

**Schreyer, Dominik - 02:42**

In dem anderen, da zeige ich dann, da geht es um so Stadionnachfrage, eigentlich so ein bisschen um die Themen, die ihr auch so ein bisschen, also mehr um das Business dahinter und dann geht es so ein bisschen in die Literatur.

Was total interessant ist, wir machen jetzt seit 1956 gibt es Sportökonomie-Forschung und es gibt 250 Paper zur Stadion-Nachfrage, also das Thema, mit dem ihr euch beschäftigt. Aber niemand guckt diese kleinen Liga an. Und in der Tat muss ich ein bisschen schmunzeln. Es gibt ein Paper zu Small League Demand, das guckt sich Österreich und die Schweiz an.

Also das, was du gerade gesagt hast, das ist keine kleine Liga.

Ist eigentlich ganz lustig, weil alle immer vor ihrer Haustür kehren.

Es gibt ganz viele US, es gibt ein bisschen Im MLB gibt es unfassbar viel, da kommt es historisch auch her.

Dann kommt Fußball, Fußball fast nur europäische... Premier League, ein bisschen Bundesliga, zerklüftet so ein bisschen, aber tatsächlich Frauensport ganz, ganz wenig.

Und alles, was unter der Schweiz ist vielleicht keine Chance.

Also Wahnsinn, von daher gut, dass ich die Thema jemanden annimmt, weil ich da auch keine Zeit für habe.

Aber es ist spannend, muss ich schon sagen.

Es ist die Frage, warum das passiert.

Wenn man sich den Markt anguckt, dann hast du eigentlich so 50% des ganzen Incomes also UEFA Zahlen des ganzen Ticketing-Markets gehen auf irgendwie die 20 unsern stärksten Clubs.

Also 50% auf 20 Clubs.

Dann geht ja relativ viel noch auf die anderen Clubs in den Top-Ligen.

Er hat jetzt eine interessante Implikation.

Das eine könnte jetzt sein, es gibt einfach keine Nachfrage.

Das guckt einfach keiner oder das aktiviert keiner oder die Tickets sind zu günstig in den anderen Ligen.

Und das ist schon interessant.

Tatsächlich ist aber natürlich eine Schlussfolgerung, dass das Revenue in diesen kleinen Ligen aus dem Ticketing eigentlich überhaupt keine Rolle spielt.

Und oft hast du es so, wenn du eine Ligenperspektive hast, du guckst mal auf so eine Liga wie Was haben wir denn da?

Meinetwegen auch Kroatien oder Israel oder wo auch immer.

Da hast du dann irgendwie ein Club, Zypern, wo dann ein Club in der Champions League spielt.

Und das Income dieser Champions-League-Einnahmen ist so hoch, nur die Preis- und Antrittsgelder, dass weil der Markt so wenig, also so unterentwickelt ist, das halt irgendwie 50, 60, 70 Prozent des ganzen Marktes einnimmt und es kriegt dann einen Klub ab.

Also es ist sehr interessant, da gibt es da tatsächlich relativ wenig zu.

Das ist sicherlich etwas, was wenig entwickelt ist, wobei wahrscheinlich auch einfach aufgrund von, weiß nicht, des Marktes, ich spreche schon wieder ganzen Podcast hier, ihr müsst mich dann einfangen, aber im Ticketing passiert da nicht viel, vor allem, wenn man sich absolute Zahlen anguckt.

#### **Tim Schaaf - 05:54**

Unser Fokus ist dann auch, also unsere erste Forschungsfrage ist, was können kleine Ligen von den großen Ligen lernen? Die zweite ist, was können kleine Ligen, wo können die sich differenzieren? Was können die vielleicht auch unique machen?

Und die dritte ist quasi das Ganze dann anzuwenden auf ein spezifisches Beispiel.

Das wird bei uns die schwedische Liga.

Sind auch nur, ich glaube, 23 momentan im UEFA-Ranking.

Also wie du schon sagst, da ist zum Beispiel Attendance super hoch.

Aber trotzdem sind halt die Einnahmen, die dahinterstehen, nicht groß, nicht signifikant.

**Dominik Schreyer - 06:24**

Gut.

Na gut, startet mal mit euren Fragen.

Ich muss mich da ein bisschen einfangen, sonst rede ich einfach ohne Ende.

**Tim Schaaf - 06:31**

Alles gut.

Ja, alles gut.

Und oft kommt da ja das wertvollste dann rum, muss man sagen.

Von daher, alles gut.

Fangen wir mal ganz basic an.

Was sind denn die Hauptgründe, warum Fans in die Stadien kommen?

Und dementsprechend auch, welche Faktoren steigern letztlich die Zusatzsauerzahl in einem Stadion?

**Schreyer, Dominik - 06:54**

Wenn wir auf die Literatur gucken, auf das, was meine Kollegen und ich die letzten 50, 60 Jahre gemacht haben, dann ist das eigentlich relativ einfach und auch erstaunlich trivial.

Es gibt ja immer ganz viele Diskussionen um Spannung und Brands und verschiedene Perspektiven, wie man da drauf gucken kann, aber eigentlich kann man es relativ einfach beschreiben.

Du hast eine Nutzenfunktion als Mensch und die besteht aus dem Abwägen von Kosten und Nutzen. So und wenn der Nutzen jetzt deutlich die Kosten, damit mein ich auch Opportunitätskosten übertrifft, dann ist es wahrscheinlich, also ich gucke mir auf einem No-Shows an, dann geht's darum ob die Leute wirklich kommen, aber das ist ja nur die zweite Entscheidung. Das ist bei der ersten Entscheidung relativ einfach.

Und man könnte es ein bisschen aus so einer Marketing-Perspektive guckt - Da wollt ihr ja auch so ein bisschen hin.

Wann bist du denn immer erfolgreich?

Ich weiß nicht, ob ihr den Barton Sharp kennt, der dieses How Brands Grow, was ja eigentlich relativ gut passt zu meinem Thema, geschrieben hat.

Das ist lustigerweise ein Co-Autor von mir und der sagt immer, es ist eigentlich ganz einfach, wie du ihn verkaufst.

Und da geht es ja auch um Ticketverkauf.

Du musst mentally and physically available sein.

Das heißt, das Produkt muss, du musst daran denken und nebenan, wo du denkst, dran denkst, muss da sein.

Das ist eigentlich der Value-Aspekt und der andere Aspekt ist der Kosten-Aspekt.

Es darf dann nicht ultra teurer sein und es darf nicht so weit weg sein.

Vielleicht gibt es noch ein paar andere Hürden.

Wenn man dann guckt, welche Faktoren so relevant sind, wenn man jetzt ein bisschen spezifischer reingeht, dann hast du eigentlich zwei No-Shows.

Warum nutzt jemand sein Ticket, also Dauerkartenkunde?

Warum geht der hin und warum geht der nicht hin?

Da gibt es einen einzigen Faktor, der in jeder Liga, bei jedem Club, bei Dauerkartenkunden da ist, das ist der Gegner.

Du kommst eigentlich nicht, also trittst dem Stadion nicht zu wegen der Heimmannschaft.

Das ist so das Base-Level.

Du identifizierst dich damit, du möchtest wieder Teil von der Gemeinschaft sein etc.

Aber eigentlich das, was differenziert ist, ist immer der Gegner.

Und das ist ein Riesenproblem, weil du kannst den Gegner natürlich nicht managen.

Also gerade als Team.

Wenn du sagst, du bist Bayern München, hast du ein Riesenproblem, weil du selber bist das attraktivste Brand und alles andere ist eigentlich immer einen Zacken schlechter.

Und deswegen ist Gegnerattraktivität Nummer 1 Erklärungskriterium.

Dann gibt es so Dinge, die daran so ein bisschen gekoppelt sind.

Das ist ja ein spezielles Produkt.

Ich habe gerade schon gesagt, du kannst es nicht alleine managen.

Das heißt, immer eine Kombination aus dem, was du machst und was der Gegner macht.

Und wo das gut eingefangen wird, ist eigentlich so über geografische Nähe.

Also Derbys funktionieren immer gut oder wo du eine spezielle Geschichte hast.

Das sind so die Sachen, die sehr positiv funktionieren und die Sachen, die das Ganze behindern sind: Ich muss ein bisschen abstrahieren von den Dauerkartenkunden -

Preis spielt eine Rolle. Was nichts kostet, ist nichts wert.

Das stimmt schon zu einem gewissen Grad.

Gleichzeitig senkt es natürlich die Hürde und dann hast du Dinge wie das Wetter.

Das ist dir einfach unangenehmer.

Minus 5 Grad, hier in Düsseldorf schneit es grade, zumindest ein bisschen, dann gehst du nicht ins Stadion und nicht so gerne.

Das musst du dir gut überlegen am Samstag.

Und deswegen spielt das Wetter immer eine Rolle, Anreisewege spielen immer eine Rolle.

Es muss eigentlich bequem sein.

Aber es gibt dieses Anstoßzeiten-Argument, dass du immer sagst, du kannst hunderte Variablen auf diese Spezifikation schmeißen.

Am Ende des Tages Auswärtsteam, Attraktivität der Paarung, also quasi Auswärtsteam plus, aber eigentlich wieder dasselbe Argument.

Da geht Value hoch.

Spiele unter der Woche sind immer ein Problem, Spiele Sonntagabend sind immer ein Problem, aber jetzt dieses 15.30, 18.30 Spiel hat keinen Effekt.

Aber der Mechanismus ist relativ einfach.

### **Tim Schaaf - 11:07**

Nur nochmal eine Verständnis-Nachfrage: Aber wenn du jetzt sagst, der Gegner spielt eine große Rolle, dann bezieht sich das nicht nur auf die sportliche Qualität, sondern auch auf die Historie des Clubs. Ist der bekannt? Ist das ein Derby?

### **Schreyer, Dominik - 11:31**

Ja genau. Das ist oft schwierig zu sagen und zu extrahieren, das ist ja ein relativ grobes Konstrukt dieses Brand. Wir versuchen das über verschiedene Faktoren zusammensetzen. Ich packe z.B. immer Marktwerte rein, weil das dann Spielqualität ist und bilde dann auch so etwas ab wie

Tradition. Du sagst, wie oft hat das (Spiel) schon stattgefunden, seit wie vielen Jahren bist du in der Liga etc.

Und dann so wie geografische Nähe.

Und diese drei Faktoren, die funktionieren eigentlich ganz gut.

Ich habe gerade ein Projekt gemacht zum Thema No-Shows mit einem Bundesliga-Club.

Da haben die mir drei Millionen Zutrittsdaten geschickt.

Also drei Millionen Tickets haben die rausgegeben und dann habe ich geguckt, okay, über mehrere Jahre, was ist da passiert?

Und ich kann mit vier Variablen fast 60 Prozent der Variante erklären.

Das ist der Marktwert des Auswärtsteams.

Die Luftfeuchtigkeit, was so ein bisschen Kombination aus Temperatur und sowas ist, dann

Windstärke und war das Spiel Sonntagabend oder nicht – that's it.

Also klar, hier gibt es auch ganz viele Kleinigkeiten, aber die großen Pattern sind das nicht.

### **Tim Schaaf – 12:38**

Okay, krass.

Gibt es denn in eurer Forschung eine Liga, muss jetzt nicht Fußball sein, kann theoretisch alles sein, die so basiert auf irgendwelchen Best Practices, in den letzten Jahren geschafft hat, ihre Attendance nachhaltig zu steigern.

Kann auch ein Club sein, wenn jetzt keine Liga anfällt.

### **Schreyer, Dominik - 13:01**

Das völlig in-your-face-Example ist natürlich Inter Miami mit Messi, was aber genau das zeigt.

Da ist jetzt das Heimteam, der zieht natürlich aber auch überall, wo er hinkommt.

Die Nachfrage ist interessant.

Da kommt Inter Miami und die haben dann mehr Dauerkarten verkauft, aber da ist natürlich eine Kapazitätsgrenze.

Mehr kannst du nicht verkaufen, aber du siehst es ganz gut da, wo er hinkommt.

Gibt es jetzt kein Papier noch nicht, aber wir haben so etwas Ähnliches mit Ronaldo gemacht für die Saudi-Arabische Liga.

Die Stars ziehen einfach, aber es ist immer dann. Also da ist es auf beiden Seiten, sowohl heim als auch auswärts, wenn man es über die Zeit sieht.

Und das ist ja interessant, du siehst ja auch dann, dass erste Vereine klagen dann, wenn Messi nicht dabei war oder wenn der nicht zu Exhibition-Games kommt oder sowas.

Also eigentlich müsste es... Völlig easy, Schweden muss sich halt dann Ronaldo holen.

Und Messi am besten beide.

Aber natürlich die Frage ist dann, okay, was ist jetzt... Also ist das jetzt... Es würde zu einer statistischen Signifikanz führen. Aber die Frage ist, ob das break-even wäre.

Wahrscheinlich nicht.

Aber das ist ein Case. Miami ist ein Case auf jeden Fall.

Zumindest mal, wenn man die Liegenperspektive drauf schaut.

Ich glaube nicht, dass sich das rechnet, aber zumindest die Nachfrage wird gesteigert.

Das kann man schon sagen.

Und dann, finde ich, gibt es schon... Es gibt so ein paar spannende Cases. Ich meine, Fortuna Düsseldorf ist ein toller Case.

Ich weiß nicht, ob ihr meine letzten LinkedIn-Post gesehen habt letzte Woche.

Die sind Top 50 jetzt in der Welt, das waren die vor ein paar Jahren nicht (in attendance)

Das hat natürlich was damit zu tun, dass sie dieses *Fortuna für alle* gemacht haben. (Fortuna für alle = Free Tickets for three games in the season)

Ich bin ja seit Tag eins mit involviert bei Fortuna für alle.

Da ist das Problem, und das haben viele Ligen auch, dass du einfach historisch gewachsene Stadien hast, die sind zu groß für die Nachfrage.

Und dann musst du irgendwas machen, weil ein leeres Stadion ist natürlich total unattraktiv für Sponsoren, für alle anderen Zuschauer, und dann kommst du in so einen Teufelskreis.

Das wird vielleicht im TV übertragen, da siehst du lauter leere Plätze und dann sagst du ja, warum soll ich denn dahin?

Und dann gibt es zwei Möglichkeiten.

Entweder kannst du die Nachfrage steigern, das ist meine Frage, wie machst du das?

Oder du kannst natürlich Kapazität reduzieren.

Eigentlich müsste man sagen, ihr habt hier eine gute Nachfrage.

35.000 Plätze könntest du immer ganz gut managen, aber 52.000 halt nicht.

Das ist auf einem anderen Level, in anderen Ligen auch so, dass historisch eher größere Stadien da sind. Das ist auch ein Riesenproblem.

Wenn du ganze leere Plätze hast, kriegst du keinen Preisdruck drauf.

Die Nachfrage ist ja nie da.

Das heißt überhaupt kein Management über die Preise.

Du kannst nicht verknappen.

Das ist ein Riesenproblem.

Und deswegen war da die Überlegung aus der Zeit, dass wir das Stadion einfach systematisch überbuchen - Das funktioniert natürlich am besten über Freitickets.

Und dann gibt es dann auch irgendwie zwei, drei andere Drehs, die eigentlich interessant sind.

Aber der Basismissionismus ist, die No-Show Rate beim Freiticket ist eins zu drei, also müssen wir eins zu drei überbuchen.

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Das ist dann nachher nicht ganz zu umgesetzt worden, weil die Tickets neu vergeben werden.

Aber da andere Leute quasi zu integrieren, das das war so die Idee, auch Zielgruppen zu erschließen, die sich das normalerweise halt nicht leisten können.

Weil auch da wieder Value versus Cost.

Wenn du den Wert nicht heben kannst, dann musst du halt gucken, dass du die Kosten reduzierst und das aber so machen, dass du es managen kannst, weil wenn du jetzt irgendwie, also sowohl, dass es nicht völlig overcrowded ist, dass du es nicht mehr managen kannst, weil Tumulte da sind, als auch, dass da nachher niemand da ist, das wäre natürlich auch ein Problem. So, ne?

Und dann hast du natürlich bei Fortuna Düsseldorf, der smarte Dreh ist natürlich, dass Sponsoren eigentlich die freien Tickets kaufen.

Das heißt, die sind ja immer ausverkauft für die Spiele, die sie jetzt haben, jetzt am Wochenende zB Elversberg; Die sind ja immer ausverkauft und geben die trotzdem, also for free. So, ne? Aber haben null Einbußen.

Das ist schon... Haben wir gut gemacht, ehrlich gesagt.

Also Fortuna ist auf jeden Fall interessant und es gibt ja auch andere Clubs, die das so ähnlich machen.

Also Paris FC hat es auch gemacht und es gibt schon so punktuell auch Clubs in anderen Sportarten, die das auch versuchen.

Ich weiß jetzt nicht genau, wie es aussieht, müssen wir mal gucken, wie es ausgegangen ist, aber es ist irgendwie die Füchse aus Duisburg, so ein Eishockey-Club, vielleicht zweite Liga oder weiß ich was, oder erste, oder zweite wahrscheinlich, haben das jetzt auch mal versucht.

Also dieses Für-alle, das funktioniert einigermaßen.

Aber es funktioniert natürlich auch nur in einem großen Markt.

Hier wohnen 650.000 Leute in Düsseldorf; Ist natürlich anders in Heidenheim, da sind sie in

einer anderen Situation.

Deswegen muss man sagen, dass diese und auch die Kraft um Messi zu kaufen, und Ronaldo hat natürlich nicht jeder, deswegen ist es schon wichtig zu akzentuieren, dass diese pauschalen Empfehlungen sind wirklich schwierig.

Es gibt auch schon zwischen den einzelnen Clubs sehr unterschiedliche Gegebenheiten.

Die Märkte sind sehr unterschiedlich, die Stadien sind sehr unterschiedlich, sodass man da ein bisschen aufpassen muss. Da gibt es nicht diesen One-Size-fits-it-all-Approach, ehrlich gesagt.

### **Tim Schaaf - 18:14**

Wir haben jetzt schon viel gesprochen über Sachen komplett außerhalb des Stadions oder auf dem Feld.

Aber noch nicht so, was das Stadion-Erlebnis an sich angeht.

Wie wichtig ist das in der sowohl Kauf- als auch Erscheinungsrate der Fans? Was können Vereine im Stadion für ein Erlebnis bieten und wie wichtig ist das den Fans?

### **Schreyer, Dominik - 18:33**

Das weiß ich ehrlich gesagt nicht so genau.

Das ist ein bisschen so eine Frage, wo es wenig Forschung zu gibt und mein Eindruck wäre, dass das im Zweifelsfall so ein Wiederkaufs-, also so Retention eigentlich betrifft.

Also du kommst, du bist damit überzeugt und dann bist du zufrieden und dann eventuell entwickelt sich so ein bisschen Word of Mouth.

Ich meine, das könnte natürlich auch funktionieren.

So ein Bring-a-friend-Approach, so ohne dass das gesteuert ist, sondern du findest das super und dann nimmst du jemanden mit und das ist dann, glaube ich, ganz spannend.

Aber die Frage ist natürlich absolut berechtigt, auch wenn ich jetzt aus der Forschung nicht die, also ich kenne keinen Paper, dass das so systematisch anguckt oder sowas.

Aber du würdest ja so ein Produkt nicht entwickeln, wie das Stadion heute da ist.

Also wenn man ganz ehrlich ist, es ist ein absurdes Produkt, das sage ich ja auch überall.

Ich komme auch ein bisschen blöd vor, weil ich immer selber erzähle, weil ich auch ein bisschen Public bin. Ich meine, du fährst da eine Stunde hin. Selbst ich in Düsseldorf fahre da eine Stunde hin. Dann stehe ich in einer Schlange, wo alle stinken.

In der Bahn stinken schon alle.

Sind alle voll mit Bier.

Du hast keinen Platz.

Soll ich mein Kind mitnehmen? Das kriegt Panik in der Bahn.

Der ist vier. Oder viereinhalb.

Dann kommst du da rein.

Dann musst du ewig stehen.

Dann kriegst du ein total unterdurchschnittliches Essen.

Du kriegst ein unterdurchschnittliches Bier.

Du kannst dir dein Bier auch nicht aussuchen.

Es ist kalt oder zu warm.

Vor dir wird geraucht. Und dafür ist es fünfmal so teuer oder zehnmal so teuer, wie wenn ich ein Spiel auf Sky gucken würde, auch wenn ich da natürlich so einen monatlichen Preis habe.

Stadion ist natürlich sehr teuer auch.

Und dann, danach muss ich auch noch warten auf die Bahn, dass ich endlich wieder zurückkomme, weil Taxi kriege ich sowieso nicht.

Niemand würde sich so ein Produkt ausdenken.

Jeder Investor würde sagen, sag mal seid ihr bescheuert oder was. Und dann ist auch noch überall dasselbe.

Es passiert überall dasselbe.

Die singen einfach nur einen anderen Song.

Aber es gibt überall die Bratwurst, es gibt überall einen Song.

Du hörst nie aus der Mikroanlage, was da geredet wird.

Die Videoeinspieler sind eine absolute Katastrophe.

Das würde niemand sich so ausdenken.

Das ist einfach eine absolut berechnete Frage.

Was man da besser machen kann.

Nur zur Wahrheit gehört halt auch, dass so ein Stadion, also auch die Menschen, die da sind, ist natürlich eine sehr heterogene Gruppe.

Das heißt, ein Großteil ist natürlich auch genauso sozialisiert und findet das auch gut, wenn die Bratwurst ein bisschen zu kalt ist.

Und da gibt es ja auch schon ordentlich Unterschiede.

Ich meine, ich sage das so ein bisschen salopp, aber zwischen Haupttribüne und Stehplatz, da wird ja jetzt auch, also ich meine, ihr kommt dann aus so einer Produktperspektive. Das ist ja da auch nicht unbedingt gewollt, weil das sind ja Leute, die eigentlich ganz happy sind, wenn sie die wichtigen und die einzigen sind und die schwenken da die Banner.

Ich finde, das ist vielleicht noch so als Anekdote, es gibt ja immer diese Tendenz, da nicht von einem Produkt zu reden.

Wenn ich über Stadion-Erlebnis rede, rede ich immer von einem Produkt.

Und dann kommen immer die ganzen Fußballvereine und sagen, wow, Produkt hmm,

das wollen wir eigentlich nicht, dass wir das Produkt nennen, weil es doch ein Erlebnis ist. Aber

wenn du ein Produkt entwickeln würdest, dann würdest du deine Kunden ernst nehmen. Und wenn es Kunden sind und nicht Fans, dann würdest du überlegen, was sie wollen. Was da passiert, ist auch selbe mit Mitgliedschaften. Die werden gemolken.

Mit dem minimalen Impact wird das Maximale rausgeholt.

Und das ist natürlich also da ist wenig Interesse daran, Dinge zu verbessern, weil es würde ja irgendwo mal irgendwas passieren, aber das haben wir ja schon immer so. Das ist so ein bisschen die Tendenz.

Und jetzt komme ich natürlich mit einer Perspektive aus Ligen, wo auch in der Regel, die lange nur die Türen aufmachen mussten, die Leute sind gekommen.

Die Frage ist, wie sich das entwickelt, so in 5, 6, 7, 8 Jahren, wenn der eine oder andere Dauerkarteninhaber dann vielleicht irgendwie mal nicht mehr ins Stadion kommt, weil er gestorben ist und die nächste Generation nicht mehr kommt.

Und dann wird es eigentlich spannend. Da könnte in 10/15 Jahren dann die blanke Panik ausbrechen.

### **Tim Schaaf - 22:39**

Das ist eine sehr gute Überleitung zum Thema junge Zielgruppen, weil genau das ist ja glaube ich ein Trend, der überall zu beobachten ist, den Pique mit seiner Kings League wahrscheinlich als allererstes erkannt hat, dass eben das Produkt Fußball für die jüngere Zielgruppe aufgrund verschiedener Faktoren, wo das Stadion-Erlebnis dazugehört, nicht mehr ganz so attraktiv ist und dass man da neue Wege gehen muss.

Denkst du, dass das, also einerseits, wie hat sich aus Sicht der Forschung vielleicht die Interessen oder die Kaufargumente entwickelt in den letzten Jahren und siehst du da eine Chance, den Turnaround zu schaffen oder glaubst du, dass da die meisten Clubs an ein richtig großes Problem

stoßen, wenns darum geht, die junge Zielgruppe zu engagieren.

**Schreyer, Dominik - 23:38**

Ich glaube, dass das schon durchaus erkannt teilweise, aber es gibt da natürlich immer schon... also gerade auch bei den großen Clubs zum Beispiel.

Ich weiß, ich wollte eigentlich über kleine Clubs sprechen, aber bei den großen Clubs gibt es ja auch ein Kapazitätsproblem. Du hast bei Borussia Dortmund 55.000 Dauerkartenkunden, die werden einfach jedes Jahr im Schnitt ein Jahr älter, weil da auch keiner geht. Und wo hast du denn die Kapazität? Du bist dann bei den Tageskartenkunden, da sind aber die Margen vernünftig und die gibt es jetzt auch nicht an Kindertickets weg. Das ist immer so ein Trade-off.

Aber es gibt jetzt erste Clubs, die auch gelernt haben, dass es wichtig ist, natürlich nächste Generationen zu sozialisieren und die dann ich sage mal, so Tickets vorhalten für die nächste Generation, Kinderkarten oder Schoßkarten anbieten.

Zum Beispiel, dass du den Kleinen mitnehmen kannst, der sitzt dann auch auf dem Schoß, umsonst zum Beispiel.

Manchester United hat vor ein paar Jahren mal gesagt, wir müssen mehr junge Leute entscheiden und haben so Tickets vorgehalten.

In Eintracht Frankfurt gibt es das so ein bisschen.

Das heißt, es gibt überall so ein bisschen Ideen.

Gleichzeitig versucht man natürlich dann den Club auch in einer anderen Art und Weise nahe zu bringen. Ich meine, die sind alle in Social Media, die sind alle bei Roblox oder viele sind bei Roblox. Die versuchen sich im E-Sport da, wo halt die Brands auch so stattfinden.

Du weißt, wie es ist - Das erste Mal im Stadion, da erinnerst du dich dran.

In der Regel hat dich dein Papa irgendwann mal mitgenommen.

Und das muss halt möglich sein, sonst verlierst du die.

Und zur Wahrheit gehört natürlich auch, ich habe es angesprochen, dass es da draußen einfach extrem viele Substitute gibt.

Also ich bin jetzt nicht, sondern nicht bullish auf diese ganzen alternativen Formate. Wenn wir mal ganz ehrlich sind, die Reichweiten sind okay. Das ist jetzt aber wirklich weit weg, was Bayern München oder Borussia Dortmund hat. Selbst ne TSG Hoffenheim erreicht da wahrscheinlich unterm Strich über die Saison dramatisch mehr Leute, einfach aufgrund des Wettbewerbs auch als jetzt so eine Kings League.

Aber es zeigt natürlich, dass da ein Markt ist für alternative Angebote.

Und ich glaube, das ist halt einfach ein Wettbewerber.

Ein anderer Wettbewerber ist die NFL.

Und in dem Moment, wo wir jetzt irgendwie in so einem Global-Wettbewerbs sind, und das sehen wir zuerst in der Forschung ganz gut, da gibt es halt einfach zwei, drei, vier, fünf Produkte, die angenommen werden.

Und in dem Moment, wo meine, und da sind wir jetzt bei Im Thema, wo meine Heimatliga nicht so spannend ist, suchen die Leute sich natürlich andere, sportlich bessere Produkte. Das heißt, wir sehen, es gibt Forschungen, ich glaube auch zu den Nordics ehrlich gesagt.

Ich weiß nicht, ob es Schweden ist oder Dänemark und Finnland, aber es gibt ein Paper, das zeigt, dass die Stadionnachfrage runtergeht, wenn die Premier League spielt, zum Beispiel, in diesen Ligen.

Das ist natürlich genau das, was passiert.

Du hast eine Plattform, da spielen die Stars, das ist ein attraktiver Wettbewerb.

Das ist aber dann aber ein TV-Produkt.

Aber also, ich meine, come on, ich gehe doch jetzt nicht, wenn Weltmeisterschaftsfinale ist, dann

gehst du auch nicht mehr bei der Fortuna ins Stadion.

Das ist ja der Basismechanismus, wo ist mehr Wert, was ist das bessere Produkt und gibt es da irgendwie dann ein Substitut, das ich mir anschauen kann. Ich glaube, da haben dann die kleinen Clubs, die klein Ligen, echte Probleme und ich glaube dann, das habe ich vorhin nur so angedeutet, ich glaube dann geht es nur über diesen Marktplatz-Approach. Das Gemeinschaftserlebnis, der Marktplatz, alle Samstagabend oder Sonntagabende, wann auch immer. Ich glaube schon, dass dieses wir-Gefühl, das ist schon was, das funktioniert. Dann ist natürlich eine Strategie, das Ganze vom Sportlichen zu entkoppeln. Dann gehst du da nicht mehr hin, weil du da unbedingt gewinnen willst, weil du die Champions League gewinnen willst irgendwann mal, sondern um einfach eine gute Zeit haben.

Ich glaube, das kann man dann noch besser enablen.

Mit Blick aufs Produkt haben wir gerade darüber geredet, da passiert ja relativ wenig.

Das ist jetzt nicht ein sehr kommunikatives Element.

Ich habe zwei Dauerkarten bei der Fortuna.

Ich hasse Dauerkarten, aber natürlich selber nehme ich trotzdem welche.

Ich habe die auch selber bezahlt.

Und ich habe zwei kleine Kids.

Das heißt, meine Frau und ich können eigentlich nie zusammen hin.

Wir haben immer gesagt, wir kaufen die und nehmen immer jemanden mit.

Das heißt, für mich ist das wie, ich gehe eigentlich statt in eine Bar abends, gehe ich halt ins Stadion und dann rede ich dann 90 Minuten mit dem Buddy oder so, weißt du, und das Spiel läuft halt auch.

Und ich glaube, das ist schon auch was, was so noch nicht gelebt wird, was aber natürlich eine Möglichkeit ist, wo du sagst, okay, was wollen die Leute denn in diesem Stadion? Und ja, da ist

Fußball, aber da passiert meistens nichts und man schafft halt Angebote, wie das irgendwie nice ist.

Gibt es dann Clubs, die sagen, ja, wir wollen die leeren Plätze nicht sehen, die Leute sind da, aber die stehen oben rum, am Oberrang, die müssen auf ihre Plätze.

Nein, die müssen nicht auf ihre Plätze, die müssen da vor allem mal eine gute Zeit haben.

Und da ist ein bisschen Luft nach oben.

### **Tim Schaaf - 28:39**

Ich finde das z.B. auch in Schweden ganz spannend, da sind wir jetzt ein kleiner Exkurs aus dem, was wir schon haben. Die sind ja irgendwie 23, sportliche Qualität, wenn man jetzt auf den UEFA-Koeffizienz schaut. Aber trotzdem sind die irgendwie Kratzen an der Top 10 in Attendance und bringen halt super viele Leute ins Stadion. Die Liga ist an sich bekannt für gute Fan-Experiences, weil die Fans super viel Einfluss auf die Liga haben.

Das ist die einzige Top-30-Liga, die kein VAR hat, noch gar keinen in keiner Version.

Das könnte zum Beispiel ein Weg sein, auch für andere kleine Ligen zu sagen, okay, dann müssen wir gucken, dass wir den Fans das Gefühl geben, das ist immer noch ihr Spiel und das, was die betrifft, hier geschieht.

### **Schreyer, Dominik - 29:30**

Ich meine, das ist natürlich, gerade wenn du mit VAR angehst, das ist natürlich dann schon auch... Das sind dann auch Positionierungen.

Weißt du, das ist noch das unmittelbare Gefühl. Klar, da geht um viel Geld.

Also da vielleicht nicht so sehr, aber das könnte natürlich auch was sein, wo man sich dann differenziert.

Aber die Frage ist ja schon, wie differenzierst du dich denn?

Wo ist denn der Wert?

Das hat einen Wert, das echte, rohe Erlebnisse nach so einem Tor, ohne dass du weißt, da könnte noch jemand nochmal checken und das alles verändern.

Das ist natürlich interessant.

Und ich glaube, über sowas kann man dann schon nachdenken.

### **Tim Schaaf - 30:08**

Wahrscheinlich ist das gängige Praxis, aber trotzdem, um zu fragen, wie gut es funktioniert, wie wichtig sind denn so datenbasierte Preisgestaltungsmodelle?

Ist das absoluter Usus, dass sich Preise basierend auf Gegner und so dann anpassen oder auch Zeit, wo gespielt wird?

Oder ist gerade bei kleineren Clubs und kleineren Ligen das nur so, dass die Preise oft standardisiert sind und deswegen die Nachfrage auch so sehr schwankt.

### **Schreyer, Dominik - 30:43**

Ich glaube dynamische Preise haben alle. Die Frage ist, wie dynamisch die sind.

Diese Topspielzuschläge zum Beispiel, das ist ja auch schon eine Form von Preisdiskriminierung irgendwie. Wenn ein Bayern München kommt, dann machst du das Stadion halt voll und dann weißt du, okay, jetzt kannst du dir das noch ein bisschen abschöpfen. Ich habe vorhin Tickets gekauft für Linkin Park in Düsseldorf nächstes Jahr.

Alter Falter, ey.

Holla, da kann sich aber Fußball eine Scheibe von abschneiden.

Aber das ist schon ein guter Punkt.

Aus irgendeinem Grund gibt es eine extreme, also gerade auch in Deutschland, eine extreme Abneigung gegen diese dynamische Bepreisung, wobei alle immer nur die negativen Punkte sehen, aber es kann ja auch günstiger werden.

Das für alle ist immer Kommerzialisierung, das ist immer der Teufel, aber es kann ja auch eine totalen Chance sein.

Dann steigst du dich nach, weil du super.

Dann kommst du halt für ein Fünfer rein oder zahlst, was du willst.

Da gibt es ja durchaus verschiedene Ansätze.

Er wird auch durchaus mit unterschiedlichen Ansätzen experimentiert.

Es gibt auch schon so Clubs in zweiten, dritten Ligen, in Spanien, die so Pay What You Want zum Beispiel machen und sowas, was eigentlich ganz interessant ist, was auch ganz gut funktioniert oder die haben so Subscription-based, grade auch Kopenhagen macht das, ist jetzt nicht Schweden, aber Dänemark. Da geht schon einiges, aber so richtig dynamisch ist da noch nichts. Zumindest in den Top-Ligen, ich hab das jetzt nicht für alle im Kopf. In der Bundesliga, ein paar machen das. Zumindest so ein paar Plätze, die arbeiten mit Smart Pricer zum Beispiel zusammen. Aber das ist weit weg von Rocket Science. Da könnte man schon, gerade bei München und Borussia Dortmund, was die da liegen lassen, weil die da doch einigermaßen, auch auf dem Zweitmarkt zum Beispiel, das wäre auch interessant, das ist schon Wahnsinn.

Also ich würde sagen, das wird genutzt schon, aber nicht zu dem Extent, wie man das nutzen müsste.

Und klar, aber ich meine, Nachfrage ist immer Preis und Utility, muss ich euch ja nicht erklären.

### **Tim Schaaf - 32:59**

Wie, würdest du sagen, gibt es vielleicht noch andere Technologien, vielleicht basierend auf

Virtual Reality, die das Erlebnis zu Hause beeinflussen oder auch das Erlebnis vor Ort beeinflussen, die in Zukunft für dich einen Impact auf die Attendance haben können oder wie man das Erlebnis auch besser machen kann?

**Schreyer, Dominik - 33:34**

Ich komme natürlich immer mit dem selben Mechanismus. Für mich wäre es ein Substitut. Ich finde es eher problematisch für das Spieltagserlebnis an sich, weil ich mich immer frage, wo soll denn der Mehrwert sein?

Was ich mir zum Beispiel gut vorstellen kann ist, zum Beispiel, dass da jemand mit Augmented Reality-Brillen im Hospitality-Bereich durch die Gegend läuft und mich mit einem Namen begrüßt, das ist wertvoll.

Oder da braucht sich jemand nicht das alles merken, die wissen, was ich will, das kann ich mir vorstellen, aber das kann ich mir nicht auf Scale, also mit 40.000 Leuten vorstellen. Im Stadion selber, es gibt ja diese ganzen Applikationen und diese ganzen 5G-Test-Cases, also richtig setzt sich da nichts durch. Mir fehlt da so ein bisschen die Vorstellungskraft, dass jemand mit einer Augmented Reality-Brille im Stadion sitzt, weil es eher dann distracting ist und weil es auch nicht convenient ist.

Ich glaube sogar, ehrlich gesagt, ich glaube als Substitut könntest du die Nachfrage verringern, weil du eigentlich das Stadion-Erlebnis zu Hause haben kannst.

Warum soll es noch hingeben? Wir haben vorhin darüber gesprochen.

Gerade wenn wir drei in dem Ding virtuell zusammensitzen könnten, würdest du es nicht merken, dann ist das doch eigentlich das Beste aller Produkte.

Die Jungs aus Dortmund haben mir das erzählt, dass die in Tel Aviv, bei einem Start-up, das ist halt haptisch. Da sitzt du mit Brille und dann kommt der Spieler rein und der gibt dir einen

Handshake und spürst das halt so. Das ist nicht echt, aber das fühlt sich so an, als ob der dir die Hand gibt. Dein Star.

Das sind die Experiences, die du nie kriegst, die natürlich total spannend sind.

Das heißt, ich sehe es eher auf die Nachfrage als negativ an.

Mir fehlt so ein bisschen die Vorstellung, wie das im Stadion selber, darüber reden wir ja, die Nachfrage verbessern könnte.

Zumal mit Blick auf diese ganzen Augmentationen, in der Praxis so ein bisschen das Narrativ entwickelt wird, dass in dem Moment, wo alles AI und alles künstlich augmented wird und es gibt ja zum Beispiel diese Ideen, was Nickelodeon zum Beispiel macht, mit der NFL, dass dann irgendwie das komplett verwandelt wird oder sowas. Da ist eigentlich das Stadion-Erlebnis das letzte ist, was wirklich echt ist.

Wo du ja wirklich sicher sein kannst, dass du noch siehst, was du siehst.

Und das würde dann auch nochmal dagegen sprechen.

ich habe da, also ich würde keinen Cent draufsetzen, dass das Stadionerlebnis da revolutioniert wird, wobei das vielleicht was anderes mit Smart Lenses ist... aber I really don't know.

### **Tim Schaaf - 36:32**

Obwohl sie ja theoretisch dem einen Ausweg schaffen könnten, dass du sagst, während des Spiels auch oft ja nichts passiert.

Könnte man ja sagen, sie bieten da irgendwo einen Ausweg.

### **Schreyer, Dominik - 36:41**

Ja, aber du willst ja dann nicht deine Netflix-Serie nebenbei gucken. Also ich glaube das... Ach, was weiß ich. Ich glaube, mein Problem ist das:

Du hast dieses Produkt, das ist das Stadionprodukt.

Das Stadionprodukt ist irgendwie nicht gut oder, sagen wir mal, schlecht gealtert.

Und dann hast du ein anderes Produkt, das ist in jeder Hinsicht überlegend eigentlich.

Das ist das TV-Produkt.

Und da hast du alle Informationen, du weißt einigermaßen Bescheid, du hast Replays, du bist zu Hause bequem. Weil das so ist, wird jetzt versucht, das Stadion-Erlebnis so ein bisschen Richtung TV-Produkt zu entwickeln. Mehr Informationen, flexiblere Perspektiven. Und du entkernst eigentlich, du nimmst dem eigentlich das weg, was es überhaupt noch besonders macht.

Und das ist natürlich auch dein Utility, ist eine andere Form von Utility und das ist dieses Gemeinschaftserlebnis.

Und da ist es dann Distraction, du kannst nicht mehr in den Ritualen teilnehmen, du bist vielleicht nicht mehr präsent. Ich glaube, dass das eher die Produktqualität lindern würde.

### **Tim Schaaf - 37:47**

Gut, wir sind schon relativ weit.

Vielleicht einmal nochmal zurück, den Bogen zum Anfang zu schlagen und auch auf das grundsätzliche Thema nochmal ganz, ganz broad zurückzukommen.

Was glaubst du ist so eine Sache, die kleinere Liegen umsetzen könnten?

Wo du sagst, das würde wirklich einen nachhaltigen Effekt schlagen, was Attendance angeht. Ist das dynamisches Pricing?

Ist das vielleicht, dass du sagst, okay, jetzt haben wir eben wie Fortuna für alle oder ein Pay-as-you-want, was ja in die ähnliche Richtung geht.

Oder dass man sagt, okay, wir müssten viel mehr Partnerschaften mit lokalen Unternehmen, mit Schulen einschlagen.

Das sind alles so ein paar Sachen, die du schon eingeworfen hast, ich.

Gibt es da eine Sache, wo sagst, das funktioniert vielleicht irgendwo super gut?

Vielleicht ist ja wahrscheinlich nicht zu vergleichen mit Sportarten in Deutschland wie Eishockey, Handball, von dem Nachfrageproblem her, weil es einfach ein anderes Produkt gibt, den Fußball, eben viel mehr Aufmerksamkeit zieht.

Gibt es da eine Sache, die du glaubst, die nachhaltig richtig gut funktionieren kann.

### **Schreyer, Dominik - 39:03**

Ich glaube, dass dieses Fortuna alle gut funktionieren kann. Gibt nur 2 Möglichkeiten: Nachfrage steigern oder Angebot reduzieren. Angebot reduzieren ist teuer, musst Stadion umbauen, kost viel Geld. Ich glaube, die meisten Stadien sind zu groß, vor allem für die Zukunft. Gerade wenn wir so attraktive Substitute haben und dann bleibt eigentlich nur sowas wie das Stadion zu füllen und auf die sozialen Aktivitäten zu bauen. Ganz ehrlich: Wenn man rauszoomt aus dem Thema – geht an dem vorbei, was ihr eigentlich besprechen wollt – dann muss man sich fragen, warum man das eigentlich noch macht. Wenn man sich so ein bisschen auf diese Economics von so einem Stadion guckt, dann hast du, das macht jetzt selbst in der Bundesliga oder was, wenn du immer Transfers rausnimmst, macht das vielleicht 14-15% vom Umsatz aus.

Und davon sind aber 60% aus dem Hospitality-Bereich.

Das heißt, diese Chance mit einem Public-Bereich, ein Public ist eigentlich nur Werbung für das TV-Produkt und Werbung für das Hospitality-Produkt.

Eigentlich verlierst du mit, es gibt durchaus Szenarien, wo du mit den meisten Public Plätzen überhaupt auch Geld verlierst.

Und wenn du es dann auch umsonst machst, ist ja schon die Frage, wie oft lässt sich das tragen.

Auch Sponsoren, das muss dann etwas lokales sein.

Nicht jeder Standort hat jemand, der das dann irgendwie potent abbilden kann.

Also in der Bundesliga schwer, vielleicht dann kleine Ligen.

Aber das ist schon ein bisschen die Frage, warum man das überhaupt macht.

Warum mache ich das überhaupt noch?

Ich habe das jetzt neulich diskutiert im Frauen-Sport, die in einer ganz ähnlichen Situation sind.

Die haben ein bisschen zu große Stadien.

Ist jetzt Double-Digit-Growth, aber auf welchem Level denn?

Also super klein und auch Deaccelerating.

Mich erinnert, habe ich auch in einem Podcast erzählt, mich erinnert das so ein bisschen an so Entwicklungsländer. Du bist jetzt in Angola oder was?

Dann willst du jetzt eine Telekommunikationsinfrastruktur aufbauen.

Und dann guckst du nach Europa und sagst dir, da haben sie damals das Festnetz aufgebaut.

Und dann haben sie irgendwie 1G, 2G, 3G, 4G, 5G.

Aber jetzt würdest du ja in Angola mit 5G anfangen. Da würdest du ja jetzt nicht sagen, nur weil die damals mit Festnetz angefangen haben, machen wir das jetzt auch.

Der Revenue-Stream aus dem Stadion ist ein bisschen für mich auserzählt.

Der Markt ist groß, aber er ist sehr dominiert von ganz wenigen Clubs, von Top-Clubs, von Plattformen.

Du bist im Public-Bereich nicht unbedingt break-even, das meiste kommt aus der Hospitality-Seat. Verknappung ist teuer, Nachfrage ist eigentlich ungewiss.

Die Frage ist, ob du den Attendance-Aspekt, für den ihr euch interessiert, rausnimmst und aufs Business guckst, aufs Sportbusiness, musst du dich fragen, ob du eigentlich was ganz anderes machen musst. Ob du nicht Wege finden musst, TV zu stärken, über Social Media die Leute zu engagieren, Storytelling zu machen, 24-7 und eigentlich ganz andere Sachen zu erzählen, weil du

bist ja in einem Wettbewerb, den kannst du eigentlich gewinnen. Mir fehlt völlig das Verständnis, wie irgendjemand der Premier League das Wasser abgraben kann.

Das ist eigentlich nicht möglich.

Es sei denn, du versuchst es so, weißt du was, mit sehr viel Geld, wie so ein Saudi-Arabien, aber selbst wird Jahrzehnte dauern, weil es einfach nicht gut gelernt ist.

Und da bin ich dann schon so ein bisschen pessimistisch, was so kleine Ligen angeht.

Du wirst immer den Marktplatz haben, du wirst immer Soziale haben, aber das sind nicht tausende Plätze in der Regel.

Und das ist schon was, wo ich denke, naja gut, wenn es wirklich Dinge gibt wie eine Apple Brille, kann auch nicht jeder zahlen, verstehe ich alles, aber gute Substitute oder sowas wie die Cosms, Sportsbars, die ihr dann eigentlich schon sehr viel vereint von dem, was im Stadion ist, ich habe da wenig Fantasie so.

**Tim Schaaf - 43:12**

Ja, kann ich verstehen und ich finde es auch sehr, sehr spannend und auch wir haben auch versucht, oder werden versuchen, diese Perspektive, so Storytelling, und auch so irgendwie unique zu sein und rauszustechen aus der Masse, das auch mit aufzugreifen, eben, dass du eben deine Relevanz hältst.

**Schreyer, Dominik - 43:33**

Und ich meine, das ist ja was, was dann vielleicht funktionieren kann, so, ne?

Also wenn wir so ein bisschen auch über die Verjüngung nochmal nachdenken, dieses, wo bist, also, ne, du bist mentally and physically available, da musst du halt reingehen, wo die nächste Generation ist.

Wo ist die?

TikTok.

Interessiert mich persönlich gar nicht, aber das können wir nicht ändern.

Die sind alle auf TikTok.

Also musst du Geschichten erzählen auf TikTok.

Und wenn dann jemand an Fußball, Frauenfußball, was weiß ich was denkt, dann musst du da sein und dann kannst du eigentlich versuchen, dann da das Ticket zu verkaufen.

Und dann gibt es vielleicht One-Off-Events.

Weißt du, bei Frauenfußball funktioniert das auch.

Du kriegst auch 50.000 Leute in so einem Stadion.

Aber halt nicht ständig.

Und dann musst du ein kleines Angebot schaffen, wo du ein gutes Produkt hast.

500 Leute, meinetwegen. Vielleicht 1000. Das kannst du gut managen.

Das ist eine gute Zeit. Du kannst verknappen.

Und ab und zu machst du ein großes Event, gehst mal in ein großes Stadion und so.

Aber ich glaube, da musst du dynamischer werden.

Da musst du ein bisschen gucken, wo du herkommst, was die richtigen Kanäle sind.

Und da ist viel Fantasie.

Aber ich würde jetzt nicht versuchen, der Premier League oder der Bundesliga nachzueifern. Ich glaube das ist ausweglos.

### **Tim Schaaf - 44:36**

Und dafür muss man wahrscheinlich viel traditionelle Strukturen aufbrechen, um das Denken

auch rauszukriegen.

**Schreyer, Dominik - 44:49**

Absolut.

**Tim Schaaf - 44:53**

Gut.

Sehr, sehr spannend. Vielen vielen Dank!

**Schreyer, Dominik – 45:00**

Hilft euch das?

Hab ich irgendeine Frage beantwortet?

**Justus Anton Pränger - 45:01**

Auf jeden Fall.

**Tim Schaaf - 45:03**

Echt super, super spannend.

Vielen, vielen Dank.

## **Interview 2: André Breitenreiter**

André Breitenreiter is a renowned German football coach, currently 51 years old. With a professional playing career spanning 16 years, he transitioned to coaching in 2010. Over the years, he has gained extensive experience at various levels of football, having served as the head coach for prominent clubs such as SC Paderborn, FC Schalke 04, Hannover 96, FC Zürich, TSG 1899 Hoffenheim, and most recently Huddersfield Town in England.

Breitenreiter's diverse coaching career has exposed him to the competitive landscapes of international leagues, making him an ideal subject for exploring strategic differences between large and small leagues. Even though the interview focused mainly on differences between clubs, as this is his expertise as a coach, many learnings can be applied to leagues from that.

The written interview was conducted in German, his native language, to ensure clarity and accuracy of his insights, minimizing the risk of information loss due to translation. For this thesis, an English translation of the interview has been provided.

### **Wie unterscheiden sich Ihrer Meinung nach die Herausforderungen und Arbeitsweisen zwischen großen und kleinen Vereinen?**

Ganz klar finanzielle Möglichkeiten. Mit Geld bekommst du in der Regel Qualität, wenn du sorgfältig bei der Auswahl bist. Das gilt für Spieler ebenso wie für Mitarbeiter. Auch die Größe des Staffs, der Mitarbeiter in den einzelnen Abteilungen und damit die Anzahl von Fachleuten und entsprechender Software wird durch die Finanzen und die Größe des Clubs bestimmt. Platt gesagt: In kleineren Ligen müssen die Prozesse optimiert und mehrere Aufgaben durch einzelne Personen ausgeführt werden, da die finanziellen Mittel begrenzt sind, insgesamt muss man mehr improvisieren. Es ist wie der Unterschied zwischen dem Führen einer Motoryacht und einem

Segelboot.

### **Wie muss man sich als Trainer bereit sein anzupassen, wenn man einen kleineren/größeren Verein trainiert?**

Um beim Beispiel zu bleiben, musst man auch als Trainer bei einem kleineren Klub Vieles selbst machen, sich um viel mehr kümmern abseits deiner eigentlichen Verantwortlichkeit, die Mannschaft zu führen und zu trainieren. So verliert man oft auch Energie durch die Mehrfachbelastung. Andererseits ist es sehr lehrreich, kann im guten Team auch Spaß machen, weil man durch den geringeren öffentlichen Druck von Fans und Medien sich mehr ausprobieren kann. In Top Ligen zählt aufgrund der Budgets oftmals nur das nackte Ergebnis. Dort sitzt man im großen Klub am Steuerrad und befehligt als Kapitän die Mannschaft. Man steht einem Team von Spezialisten und oft Top-Seeleuten vor. Die Aufgabe des Trainers/Managers ist es, aus allen ein Team zu bilden und die Richtung vorzugeben. Man steht dort extrem im Wind, aber je größer das Schiff, desto höher der eigene Wert.

### **Was für Unterschiede macht das bei der Trainingsgestaltung?**

Gemeinsamkeiten in jeder Liga der Welt sind körperliche Fitness und Einstellung als Grundvoraussetzung für Erfolg. Ebenso die individuelle taktische Schulung jedes einzelnen Spielers.

Unterschiede zwischen Spielern aus Top Ligen zu kleineren Ligen sind insbesondere die technisch-taktischen Möglichkeiten der Spieler in der Spitze, sowie deren Handlungsschnelligkeit in Kürze, die richtige Option für eine richtige Entscheidung zu treffen. Je besser die Technik und Handlungsschnelligkeit, desto schneller die Spielgestaltung, desto mehr taktische Möglichkeiten, desto mehr Torchancen und bessere Verwertung in Tore. Spieler aus top Ligen benötigen einfach

weniger Chancen, um ein Tor zu erzielen. Aufgrund Ihrer hohen technisch-taktischen Möglichkeiten unter Spieldruck, die richtige Entscheidung zu wählen, besitzen sie höhere Effizienz, was gleichbedeutend mit höherer Qualität zu setzen ist.

Daher liegen die Unterschiede unter anderem darin, dass Technik und Taktik in den unteren Ligen einen großen Bestandteil des Trainings ausmacht, in den oberen Ligen hingegen als Voraussetzung angesehen wird.

### **Was sind Strategien, die es Vereinen/Ligen kostengünstig ermöglichen, mit den *Großen* mitzuhalten?**

Alle Vereine sind in der Regel ähnlich aufgestellt und brauchen für Erfolg Geld. Daher ist bei jedem Verein zunächst einmal die Suche nach möglichst großen Sponsoren eine Kernaufgabe.

Die Suche vereinfacht sich natürlich durch Medien- und TV Präsenz. So erhalten top Ligen durch ihre internationale Vermarktung ganz andere Möglichkeiten und Einnahmen wie Teams aus den kleineren Ligen, deren Präsenz sich fast ausschließlich auf den eigenen Markt ihres eigenen Landes reduziert.

Neben den Sponsoren als Einnahmequelle spielen insbesondere die Einnahmen durch Ticketverkäufe eine große Rolle bei kleineren Teams. Bei Teams großer Ligen sind es die Einnahmen durch TV-Gelder, die die wichtigste Rolle spielen.

Die Strategie der Spielerentwicklung junger Talente, um mit ihnen Transfererlöse als Einnahmequelle zu erzielen, ist bei großen wie kleinen Ligen gleich ausgeprägt, auch wenn kleinere Teams/Ligen deutlich mehr davon abhängig sind. Unterschiedlich ist auch das Regal, in dem man sich bedienen kann.

Der grundsätzliche Vorteil eines kleineren Klubs kann eine schlankere Struktur und damit kürzere Entscheidungsprozesse sein. In großen Klubs möchten viele Gremien und Personen

Mitspracherecht, es gibt deutlich mehr persönliche Eitelkeiten, auf die man Rücksicht nehmen muss.

### **Gibt es eine Balance zwischen finanziellem und sportlichem Erfolg? Oder wird eines immer mehr priorisiert?**

Der frühere HSV-Präsident Bernd Hoffmann sagte mal: „Profifußball ist der Wunsch nach maximalem Erfolg unter Vermeidung der Insolvenz.“ Das Zitat zeigt, unter welchen Zwängen die Klubs leiden. Um erfolgreich zu sein, musst du investieren. Bist du damit aber nicht erfolgreich, rutscht du womöglich völlig ab. Es ist immer wieder eine Gratwanderung.

### **Ist es für kleine Klubs und Ligen überhaupt möglich, langfristig zu konkurrieren?**

Einfache Antwort: Auf Strecke nicht. Die Bundesliga-Top-4 ist im Grunde zementiert und wenn, wie letzte Saison geschehen, es ein Überraschungsteam gibt, wechseln deren Top-Spieler anschließend zu den größeren Klubs und das Spiel beginnt wieder von vorne. In den europäischen Top-Ligen ist das nicht anders. Das gleiche gilt für die kleineren Ligen, deren Top-Spieler immer im Fokus der großen Ligen stehen. Deshalb müssen sich die Ligen in z.B. der Schweiz, in Schweden oder Kroatien aus Ausbildungsligen verstehen, die junge talentierte Spieler so gut ausbilden, um sie attraktiv für die top Ligen zu machen um mit ihnen hohe Transfererlöse zu erzielen. Sie hätte nur durch die Einflußnahme eines großen Investors die Möglichkeit, sich den top Klubs anzunähern, allerdings würde sich die Frage stellen, welcher große Investor sich in einer No-Name-Liga entsprechend einbringen würde. Zudem wäre auch zu hinterfragen, ob Geld als Lockmittel allein ausreichen würde, um auch Top Spieler in die Liga zu locken. Das sehe ich eher kritisch und nicht umsetzbar.

**Was können kleinere Klubs/Ligen tun, um junge Spieler – vorerst – für sich zu gewinnen?**

**Was kann hierbei eine Strategie sein?**

Das Hauptargument für kleinere Klubs und kleinere Ligen ist die Spielzeit.

Die Durchlässigkeit junger Talente in das Profiteam ist bei kleineren Ligen und Klubs aufgrund der o.g. Strategien und aufgrund fehlender Budgets eher gegeben. So gilt z.B. Dynamo Zagreb als einer der besten Ausbildungsvereine Europas, die hohe Transferlöse mit ihren Talenten in große Ligen erwirtschaftet haben. Die eigene Liga ist für die Top Talente in meisten Fällen nicht attraktiv genug, weil sich top Spieler mit den besten messen wollen und auch den Anreiz haben, internationale Titel zu gewinnen. Das ist mit kleinen Teams so gut wie ausgeschlossen.

Oft aber werden Top-Talente von den großen Vereinen ausgeliehen, um in der eigenen Liga erfolgreich zu sein. Diese Strategie gilt es zu hinterfragen, da so finanziell nichts von der Ausbildung hängenbleibt. Lediglich eventuelle Mehreinnahmen durch die Qualifikation eines europäischen Wettbewerbs rechtfertigen die Leihen von Talenten aus anderen Ländern.

Kleine Vereine oder kleinen Ligen müssen die Ruhe und Kontinuität haben, Spieler auszubilden und so die Qualität der Mannschaft /Liga sukzessive zu steigern. Das bedingt, dass bereits in der Jugendabteilung Top-Trainer arbeiten, um Abgänge immer wieder adäquat zu kompensieren.

Zudem muss die Scouting-Abteilung gerade in den unteren Ligen bestens vernetzt sein, um passende Spieler zu finden. Zudem benötigt man auch den Mut, junge Spieler entsprechend der Strategie früh im Profiteam einzusetzen. In Kroatien erfolgt dies regelmäßig mit 16jährigen Top-Talenten.

**Ist eine langfristige Strategie im kurzlebigen Fußball überhaupt realistisch und umsetzbar?**

Es zählt zunächst überall im Fußball nur das Hier und Jetzt. Jeder Verein hat in jeder Saison

Ziele, die es zu erfüllen gilt. Diese sollten entsprechend der Möglichkeiten und einer gesunden Selbsteinschätzung realistisch formuliert sein. Geht es für top Teams ausschließlich um Titel und Trophäen, muss es für kleinere Teams und Ligen auch Ziele wie Transfererlöse, Entwicklung junger Spieler zu Nationalspielern, Ausbildung von top Talenten und Trainern gehen.

Eine langfristige Strategie, siehe oben, verlangt Geduld, Vertrauen, den angemessenen Umgang mit Rückschlägen, den Mut zu Korrekturen und die Standhaftigkeit gegenüber Medien und oft auch Fans.

Insbesondere durch die Ruhe und Geduld, eine klare Identität zu haben und eine Idee erfolgreich zu verfolgen, steigert man meiner Meinung nach auch das Interesse von Talenten und auch Sponsoren, sich diesem Klub anzuschließen, um den einen möglichen nächsten Entwicklungsschritt zu gehen.

### **Interview 3: Simon Schaeff**

Simon Schaeff is an assistant manager at a German player and coach agency, where he plays a pivotal role in scouting and talent identification. Focused on the top-talent segment aged 16-21, Schaeff works to identify players relevant to the German market, either facilitating their transfer to Germany or signing them to the agency. His expertise in talent scouting and the intermediary role between players and clubs provides valuable insights into the dynamics of player representation and market strategies. The interview was conducted via e-mail and is therefore rather a structured interview.

#### **1. Talent Development & Recruitment**

**Q: What factors make smaller leagues attractive for players? What could make them more appealing? Would you say that small leagues are/can be an essential step in a career?**

Various key factors come into play. The most important is the ability to get playing time. Players, especially young ones, might *downgrade* to a smaller league to get more minutes. A good example is Maxi Beier—he was loaned out to the second division to get more playing time. The same applies to leagues like the Austrian league or other smaller leagues where players can adapt to European football.

Visibility is another crucial factor. Small leagues can provide players with opportunities to play internationally, allowing them to prove themselves on a different level—not just in the domestic league. For instance, leagues with playoffs, like the Swiss league, allow teams finishing as low as 6th to still play internationally, which boosts player visibility.

Salaries are, of course, also significant. Financial backing is vital to support young players.

Overall, small leagues can be an essential step for players to *explode* and showcase their talent.

**Q: How do smaller leagues compare to larger leagues in terms of career growth potential for players? What are essential factors to consider as a league if you want to become more attractive for talent?**

Getting minutes is key. For young players, the real *salary* in their early years isn't money—it's the opportunity to play and develop. There's solid evidence showing that players who get the most minutes are the ones who tend to reach their potential.

If a league develops players consistently, it gains recognition, which then attracts other young talents. A great example is Bodo/Glimt—they develop young players while also playing internationally. For instance, Hauge scored two goals in European qualification matches and immediately received interest from clubs across Europe.

To attract young talents, leagues need to care about them. That means accepting that young players will have bad games, might not know the language, and will need guidance. Leagues could implement support structures like transition managers to help young players integrate better.

**Q: Do you think the international football landscape, also for attracting young talent, will significantly change due to leagues like Kings/Icon League?**

I don't see these leagues changing the landscape, at least not for now. The level of competition isn't good enough, and players aren't challenged. They also play small-sided football, so the skills learned aren't fully transferable. A player would benefit more from playing in Sweden's second division, for example.

That said, offensive players might benefit from the 1v1 situations in these leagues to improve their technique. If professionals start using these leagues to stay fit—like Vuskovic—it might eventually open opportunities for young talents, but I’m sceptical.

## **2. Best Practices in Player Representation**

### **Q: What are some best practices from larger leagues or innovative leagues in terms of contract negotiation, talent scouting, and player representation?**

It’s hard to generalize at the league level because often, it’s specific clubs leading the way, with others in the league following their example. Take RB Salzburg in Austria—they focus on signing players from Africa, a market that isn’t actively scouted by many German teams. Austrian clubs, including Sturm Graz and LASK Linz, benefit from this strong network, scouting, developing, and selling players for high fees.

Similarly, FC Nordsjælland in Denmark operates as part of the *Right to Dream* academy, integrating their own player agency. They’ve already sold players for 30+ million euros, and other Danish clubs are starting to follow suit.

In terms of contract negotiations, Basel stands out. An example is Calafiori, whom they bought from Genoa and later sold with a 40% sell-on clause. Strategies like these enable smaller leagues to secure long-term financial benefits.

### **Q: Are there strategies from the agents’ perspective that smaller leagues can use to retain and attract high-potential players?**

One strategy *smaller* leagues can use is keeping their transfer windows open longer than the *bigger* leagues. For example, Belgium’s transfer window stays open until September 9. This

allows smaller leagues to attract players who aren't getting enough playing time in top leagues after the season starts.

Retaining players is much harder. Smaller leagues are often viewed as steppingstones, with everyone dreaming of clubs like Real Madrid or the Premier League. However, retaining talent could be improved by genuinely caring for players—making them the face of your league or development system and making them feel appreciated. It's not easy for smaller markets but could be effective.

### **3. Growth through Representation & Branding**

**Q: How can smaller leagues enhance their image internationally to attract more prominent players or coaches? Would it, for example, be a strategy for them to create better contacts and relations with agents?**

If you want to attract better players or coaches, you need resources—either power or money. For instance, Zenit St. Petersburg had to spend significant amounts to bring in André Villas-Boas when he was still a top coach.

Relationships with agents can be helpful, especially in underrepresented markets. If a league or club becomes one of the top contacts in a specific market, it can gain an advantage. But, as mentioned earlier, attracting stars has historically depended on money.

**Q: Do you see potential in using players as brand ambassadors for smaller leagues, and if so, how?**

There are two parts to this. If the goal is to grow the league's profile with prominent players,

using them as brand ambassadors can work—like MLS with Beckham and now Messi. However, this approach is risky and doesn't always improve sporting quality sustainably.

Alternatively, leagues can focus on promoting players they've developed. For instance, the Swiss league could highlight stars like Xhaka to showcase its role in their careers.

#### **4. Talent Acquisition & Mobility**

**Q: Do you have examples from other sports or leagues where innovative approaches in talent mobility have made a league more attractive to players?**

One example is the *Moneyball* strategy from baseball, where analytics and unconventional thinking helped identify undervalued talent. Some football clubs, like Union Saint-Gilloise and Brighton, have adopted similar approaches, scouting bench players and developing them into stars.

Another example is Chinese basketball, where clubs have brought in famous players, but that's heavily reliant on financial resources.

#### **5. Player Branding & Representation Strategies**

**Q: Have you observed strategies in leagues where players were successfully used as brand ambassadors for the league, and how could smaller football leagues learn from this?**

I've already mentioned examples like Hulk and Oscar in China, Beckham and Ibrahimović in MLS, and now Messi, as well as Saudi Arabia with their recent investments. However, I don't think smaller leagues can learn much from these examples. They rely heavily on significant financial resources, which isn't realistic for smaller leagues.

**Q: What player representation strategies from larger leagues could smaller leagues adopt to retain and develop talent in the long term?**

One potential strategy, although I'm not sure how realistic it is, involves using the league's unique calendar to its advantage. For example, Nordic leagues, with their summer seasons and long winter breaks, could use the offseason to visit foreign markets like Thailand, China, or India.

These trips could build international visibility and establish the league as a recognizable football brand in regions where European leagues don't typically engage during that time of year. It's a creative way to tap into new markets without competing directly with larger leagues.

## **6. International Image and Market Positioning**

**Q: In your view, are there proven practices for enhancing a league's reputation and visibility on an international scale that would be realistic for smaller football leagues to implement?**

Proven practices show that leagues need to have a clear value system and follow it consistently. However, in Europe, sporting quality is always the most critical factor for reputation. Austria provides an excellent example: clubs like RB Salzburg and Sturm Graz have boosted the league's reputation through their performance and the quality of players they've produced.

The Austrian federation also implemented rules requiring a minimum number of homegrown players, which supports player development and enhances the league's sporting quality. Similar policies could work for other leagues aiming to develop their identity and increase competitiveness.

Another example is Bodo/Glimt, which has become a recognizable name in European football for producing quality players. Portugal and the Netherlands are also well-known for their

## Literature & Appendix

development pipelines. Of course, increasing salaries can help attract talent and improve visibility, but that's not feasible for every league.

#### **Interview 4: Joel Pille**

Joel Pille is the scouting coordinator for a German third-division football team. In his role, he manages and organizes the talent identification process, balancing limited resources with the demands of competitive football. He has extensive insights into how smaller clubs navigate scouting challenges, prioritize players, and leverage innovative strategies to stay competitive in the market.

The written interview was conducted in German, his native language, to ensure clarity and accuracy of his insights, minimizing the risk of information loss due to translation. On request, an English transcript can be provided.

#### **Talent-Scouting-Prozess**

Herausforderungen bei kleineren Budgets sind klar spürbar. Begrenzte Ressourcen erschweren ein flächendeckendes Scouting erheblich. Oft fehlen notwendige Infrastruktur und erfahrene Scouts, die Spieler umfassend bewerten können. Der Zugang zu fortschrittlichen Tools wie Datenanalyse ist ebenfalls eingeschränkt, und die Budgets erlauben es selten, regelmäßig internationale Turniere oder Spieler zu beobachten.

#### **Sind mehr Ressourcen automatisch mit besseren Ergebnissen verbunden?**

Nicht zwangsläufig. Effizienz und Strategie sind entscheidend. Selbst größere Budgets müssen zielgerichtet eingesetzt werden, um tatsächlichen Mehrwert zu bringen.

Die Prioritäten kleinerer Ligen unterscheiden sich klar von denen in größeren Ligen. Nationale Transfers stehen im Vordergrund, ebenso wie die Verpflichtung von Entwicklungsspielern mit

Wiederverkaufswert, allerdings mit einer kürzeren Entwicklungszeit. Experimente sind aufgrund kleinerer Kader und kürzerer Vertragslaufzeiten oft nicht möglich.

Um für junge Talente attraktiver zu werden, setzen kleinere Vereine auf starke Jugendakademien. Regelmäßige Spielzeit und individuelle Förderung spielen hierbei eine zentrale Rolle.

Partnerschaften mit größeren Vereinen können diese Bemühungen zusätzlich unterstützen.

Eine alternative Strategie zu Karrieresprungbrett-Ansätzen gibt es nur begrenzt. Es hängt stark von der Identität der Liga ab. Altstars zu verpflichten könnte eine Option sein, ist jedoch letztlich eine Frage der finanziellen Mittel.

### **Best Practices im Scouting**

Erfolgreiche Ansätze aus größeren Ligen basieren häufig auf besserem Zugang zu Informationen.

Scouting bleibt jedoch immer eine informierte Entscheidung, unabhängig von der Ligengröße.

Zur Optimierung von Scouting-Netzwerken könnten mehr Kooperationen zwischen Vereinen hilfreich sein. Das bleibt jedoch stark abhängig von der Liga- und Vereinsidentität. Ein

entscheidender Faktor bleibt, wie viel Mehrwert ein einzelner Scout für den Verein liefern kann.

Kostengünstige Taktiken hängen stark vom Prozess ab. Der gezielte Einsatz von Videoanalysen,

Daten oder Live-Beobachtungen kann den Erfolg eines kleinen Vereins im Scouting stärken.

### **Nutzung von Innovation zur Konkurrenzfähigkeit**

Technologische Methoden wie KI-gestützte Analysen spielen eine immer größere Rolle, um

Spielerdaten effizient auszuwerten. Dennoch bleiben gewisse Hierarchien bestehen – nicht alle

Spieler können in der Bundesliga spielen. Fortschritte, die kleinere Ligen machen, werden zudem

von höherklassigen Teams ähnlich genutzt, was die Vorteile relativiert.

### **Strategische Scouting-Anpassungen**

Ansätze aus anderen Sportarten, wie der *Moneyball*-Ansatz (z. B. Goalimpact), könnten hilfreich sein. Auch Mentalitätsanalysen könnten in das Scouting integriert werden, um eine bessere Auswahl zu treffen.

Ein Fokus auf übersehene Talente könnte weitere Vorteile bringen. Beispielsweise könnte die gezielte Entwicklung von athletischen Fähigkeiten den Spielern helfen, sich von der Konkurrenz abzuheben.

### **Zusammenarbeit im Scouting und Ressourcenteilung**

Kollaborative Scouting-Partnerschaften sind möglich, jedoch schwierig umzusetzen, da es sich letztlich um ein Konkurrenzgeschäft handelt. Doppelanstellungen könnten hier eine Lösung sein, bergen jedoch ebenfalls Herausforderungen.

Partnerschaften mit Jugendakademien werden bereits in vielen Fällen praktiziert, könnten jedoch weiter ausgebaut und verbessert werden.

Eine Multi-Club-Besitzstruktur bietet Vorteile wie geteilte Ressourcen, Trainer, Analysten und gemeinsame Scouting-Datenbanken. Junge Talente können innerhalb der Struktur optimal gefördert werden. Allerdings besteht auch die Gefahr, dass einzelne Vereine ihre Identität verlieren, wenn die Zentralisierung zu stark ist.

**Interview 5: James O’Neill**

James O’Neill is an expert in business development, strategic partnerships, and sports marketing. Having previously worked at 433, one of the largest and most influential football-focused social media platforms, O’Neill has significant experience in leveraging digital media for branding and fan engagement. Currently, he serves at VE2 Max, where he specializes in strategic partnerships and sports marketing. In addition to his role, he is actively involved in a transformative project aiming to elevate a small Portuguese football club into one of the country's premier teams, showcasing his innovative approach to football development.

His expertise in marketing, branding, and strategic growth within the sports industry makes him a valuable contributor to discussions on enhancing the global competitiveness of football clubs and leagues. The interview, conducted via Microsoft Teams on November 15th, lasted approximately 40 minutes and provided critical insights into the role of branding and marketing in modern football.

**Introduction & Pre Talk:**

**Tim Schaaf - 01:57**

Good morning.

**James O’Neill – 1:59**

Hello.

How are you doing?

**Justus Anton Pränger - 02:01**

Good.

How are you?

**James O'Neill - 02:04**

Yeah, all good.

All good. Thanks for the flexibility, for the time.

Apologies for being a little bit late.

Just one of those days where one thing falls behind and then you're totally backed up.

So, yeah.

**Tim Schaaf - 02:17**

No worries at all.

I mean, it's your time we're taking today, so we really appreciate that.

So no worries, no worries at all.

**James O'Neill - 02:26**

All good, all good, no worries.

So how's everything going, Tim?

It's been a long time.

**Tim Schaaf - 02:31**

Yeah, very good.

Yeah, it's been already the second time I need your help, even though we don't really know each other.

No, it's going really good.

Unfortunately, I had to leave Prematch because I wanted to do my masters.

Now I'm here in Lisbon and writing my master thesis about how we can increase the competitiveness of smaller leagues.

I think your sports marketing expertise can be really helpful for us.

**James O'Neill - 03:08**

No, perfect.

Really good to hear.

Happy to help.

Hope it can help.

Did you say you're based in Lisbon doing your masters?

**Tim Schaaf - 03:20**

Yes, we are.

**James O'Neill - 03:26**

Interesting.

I was in Portugal earlier this week.

We now own a very small football club which is based just outside of Lisbon in Cascais.

**Tim Schaaf - 03:34**

Ah, yeah, of course we know that.

Our university is like basically halfway through between Cascais and Lisbon.

**James O'Neill - 03:46**

Oh right, okay, interesting.

Maybe there's something... I don't know.

We can talk about that another time basically but we're of course in the early stages of development with the club and getting everything set from a Yes, from a project perspective, from a commercial and from a marketing perspective.

But of course, there's a lot of relevance to your topics and questions.

How can smaller clubs, smaller leagues utilize it?

Maybe there's something we can do there in the future.

We can talk about that another time.

There's more than enough to go through here.

**Tim Schaaf - 04:27**

I'm certain of that.

Is it okay for you if I record the meeting?

Okay, then you just need to turn back your camera and microphone on back in five seconds.

Okay, perfect.

**INTERVIEW**

**Tim Schaaf - 05:00**

So, let's get started.

Thanks for taking the time today.

Maybe let's just start right, very basic.

So what do you think -

How can smaller leagues overall effectively position themselves to increase to a wider audience, maybe also internationally?

**James O'Neill - 05:17**

Yeah, I think the first thing they should do is not try and replicate what the big five, six leagues in the world do because there's certainly not a one-size-fits-all approach and also just trying to Copy what they see as industry standard.

It may work for those bigger clubs, those bigger leagues, but it's completely irrelevant from a strategy perspective for smaller clubs and leagues.

So I think, firstly, it's not copying.

But what is really important then is they need to establish their own, I guess, brand, identity, what makes them unique.

Building their strategy around the uniqueness, USP, and DNA and the stories that come from that is what's going to help them appeal to that wider audience because they offer something new, something different.

**Tim Schaaf - 06:20**

Do you think this can also be a valid strategy just to like also gain fans internationally like beyond your own borders because I feel like many leagues are still relevant within their own country but as far as it's going like outside of their country the sportive quality is just not high enough to be relevant.

Do you feel there is like a strategic decision for that or positioning?

**James O'Neill - 06:52**

Yeah, I think it's obviously more difficult for smaller leagues and clubs to do that on an international scale, but I think there's really good examples of clubs and leagues that do all that do different things to position themselves internationally.

I think if you look at the on the bigger side of things, the Bundesliga do a really great job by identifying their key strategic markets and then looking at the players that have been part of the league and really tapping into those stories from players like Giovanni Elber in Brazil, for example, the ex Bayern Munich player. There's been an influx of US players into the league as well, whether it Pulisic from his time in Dortmund, for example.

Asian players as well, I think, at the top level, they do a really good job of maximizing the size and scale of the league and using the stories international players from around the world to grow their fan bases.

But on the smaller end of the scale, I think it comes down to really showcasing the edge, the uniqueness of the brand and its DNA.

So I would look at examples like Athens' Kallithea.

So really, really small Greek club based in Athens.

And they've managed to create a huge global presence really based on the their brand, their brand identity and DNA is incredibly strong.

It taps into the arts culture side of things.

It's maybe a bit more of a fashion-focused approach.

They've been able to tap into that and also generate a lot of interest globally, maybe not necessarily on what the players do in 90 minutes, but on the club's overall branding and identity.

So, yeah, there are definitely ways which smaller clubs can, for sure.

**Tim Schaaf - 09:17**

Do you feel like that branding strategy which you just talked about is mainly tied to social media? How important is social media when talking about that a league wants to gain really international audience?

**James O'Neill - 09:35**

Yeah, heavily.

I think it's probably the most important channel for them because it is so easy to well, first and foremost, it's so easy to access.

Everyone has it.

So from a cost perspective, there's not necessarily a huge necessity or burden to pay lots and lots of money for high profile big brand campaigns.

You can do a lot of organic content and storytelling which you can then distribute worldwide, of course.

So, yeah, I think that Athens Kallitheas example, social media has been absolutely essential to them because they were able to put their brand in that shop window moment and get notice from the right people.

And it's just a virality and snowball effect from there that's really increased their notoriety as a smaller club that people fascinated by from that brand.

**Tim Schaaf - 10:55**

Yeah, so that mainly relates to their off-field activities. But how would you say is it very important also to have accessible highlights of your games?

Because like for the Bundesliga I noticed that I mean, that's now a big league, but their highlights are just struck overall (Speaker meant: everywhere), if you post anything about the Bundesliga and the highlights are just available on Mondays, whereas if you share like a Premier League or from a smaller league clips, they can go viral much faster because you can share them and they will not be blocked.

**James O'Neill - 11:32**

Yeah, definitely.

I think access to football content and highlights is really, really important.

Because when you're a smaller club or league, you need to showcase what makes you different, but also you can't compromise the core part of your product, which is ultimately what happens within the 90 minutes of a game.

And we've seen plenty of examples across the football pyramid where you've had viral moments and viral content from the lower leagues, just as much if not more so than the Bundesliga and the Premier League.

So I think it's really important to strike a balance and I think the highlights and the football specific content as well as the off-field stuff is still for me, it's still really important.

**Tim Schaaf - 12:28**

OK, so Maybe coming back to a general social media perspective, what makes a social media post and maybe in the context of sport really make them go viral?

**James O'Neill - 12:44**

I think, obviously, uniqueness is important.

It has to be something New, different or on such a scale that obviously it gets noticed.

I think then controversy can sometimes come into play, of course, from a virality perspective.

But yeah, I think it all comes down to how is the piece of content more unique than something that people have seen before or rather the magnitude of the situation that a goal or an action has happened. So I think its really down to the uniqueness and the edge of the piece of content, but also the magnitude and the setting that it's in.

**Tim Schaaf – 13:56**

Okay, so that's probably also something small leagues can do really well without a huge budget, right?

**James O'Neill – 14:10**

Yeah, definitely.

And I think you've seen with companies like Veo, so the Veo camera solution, it's much more affordable than elite level broadcast technologies, of course, it's totally different ends of the spectrum, they're capturing football content from teams all around the world, across all different levels.

It's super high value content which engages really well.

You will know the Puskas award which is obviously for the best goal scored from a calendar year in all professional football but they have put their own spin on that and it's called the People's Puskas Award and that's focused on lowly grassroots level clubs and they then put those clubs and those moments on a platform and on a scale to drive that exposure and virality. So I think

that's one example where smaller leagues and clubs can still punch above their weight and have similar impact that the bigger clubs and leagues can do. They just do it in a different way.

**Tim Schaaf - 15:47**

Okay. Are there maybe forms of content or maybe also platforms which you feel are maybe underrepresented so far or where you could take successful examples from other sports or other leagues to building your own story as a small league, maybe taking the Wrexham documentary, even though it's very special, as an example?

**James O'Neill - 16:14**

Yeah, I think, I mean, of course, anything that can go onto streaming platforms presents the opportunity to generate huge exposure. The Wrexham one is a really good example.

A really good example of that, but I think for smaller clubs, of course, social media.

Mainly, I think, from a monetization perspective, there's the most potential for me, really, TikTok and YouTube, because that way you can combine short form, snappy, viral, funny content, which engages with a youth audience and within the algorithms of TikTok, it can pick up speed and virality and engagement very, very quickly.

But on the other side, you have YouTube, which again, I think is really well set up for slightly longer form or content series, which is really accessible for clubs and leagues of all levels to use when they obviously don't have the budgets or the all the eyeballs that necessarily, Wrexham as an example, has for Disney Plus to get involved.

So yeah, I think for me, TikTok, YouTube, YouTube Shorts are two really interesting platforms to engage younger, but also different audiences.

Great for engagement, of course, but also provides some, you know, some monetizable potential

as well, which is really, really important alongside exposure and engagement.

**Tim Schaaf - 18:03**

Do you think it will be crucial in the future or it will be a topic in the future that leagues have their own streaming platform where you see their games?

Because it works really well for Formula One and the NFL.

But of course, those internationally seen audiences.

Do you think that could be, for a cheap price, a better strategy with which they would still earn a lot of money?

**James O'Neill - 18:32**

It's a really good question.

I think it could be and I think it could work for certain leagues and leagues where there is already established international fan base.

These platforms for the smaller leagues and smaller clubs.

I think for them, it's maybe a little bit more difficult.

Yeah, I think a little bit more difficult for smaller leagues and clubs, but for bigger and more established ones, yeah, having their platform which they have all the access, all the rights to and they can monetize, I think.

I think that will definitely happen in the future.

**Tim Schaaf - 19:30**

If you think about the social media channels of like one specific league, we for example will probably take the Swedish league as an example.

What would you say are the most important KPIs they shall focus on?

Because like if you're talking for example by virality on TikTok, then it could also happen that fans see a video and love it and it's going really viral, but they don't remember it's from the Swedish league at all; so just views can be the ultimate gold standard right?

**James O'Neill - 20:06**

I think views can be.

Of course, likes, comments, shares as well.

I mean, this is fairly you know, basic when you're talking about impressions, but I think a lot of it can just be... guess it can also... very hard to...

Those metrics can really just be vanity metrics.

Yes, there is value in that, but actually is a like or a comment actually generating any value for you? In some cases, of course, yes, it can be but I only say that because when I used to work at 433, Obviously there's billions of impressions, let's call it like that, but it's very much kind vanity metrics driven and it's really hard to also see what is the tangible impact, especially from a commercial perspective, other than getting more followers, getting more shares on pieces of content, reposts. It's all really important but I think there's a big question mark there from what actually is the value behind that other than just the vanity metrics.

**Tim Schaaf - 21:51**

What is your opinion on potential collaborations with influencers?

Because are certain innovative new leagues arising with like Kings League or in Germany, Icon and Baller League League arising and expanding really quick where they build their own story about the influencers. But then there are also examples where, I don't know if you heard that,

German influencers who wanted to invest in a Danish second league club and the fans were so unhappy about that they had to cancel that like after a week or so or even faster.

So do you think it is a valid strategy?

And if so, what are maybe the things you need to focus that the fans won't shut it down?

**James O'Neill - 22:42**

Yeah, I think it can be a really valid and a really valuable strategy.

The examples you gave, Kings League, Baller League, are two really, really good ones because they are more innovative-driven football formats.

Let's call it less traditional football so that I think there is much more room for creativity and also the way that they're building that particular format is really driven around streaming, esports, gaming, influencer marketing. So there's a natural connection there to tap into the size, scale and fandom behind influencers.

So I think that in those types formats, there's real, I guess, relevance and authenticity behind a really influencer-led approach.

However, if you look at the example you gave, trying to leverage just the notoriety and popularity of influencers just from a size, scale, reach, popularity perspective.

Yes, it can generate, exposure. There's Potentially access to finances, huge finances from these influences that they have, but it also can be seen as really disingenuous and unauthentic, have a negative effect, just like you said with the example, with the example that you gave there. I think it can be an effective strategy, but only if it's actually authentic to the club, the league and the organisation.

For sure, a professional club could partner with yeah, could partner with an influencer or an influencer fan group, let's call it, that were lifelong fans, diehard fans. Because there's a common

thread and there's also a connection from an audience and fan perspective. That can be really successful, I think.

But I think there's definitely really bad examples where there's no actual authentic genuine connection between club and influencer and it looks really fake.

**Tim Schaaf - 25:25**

Can you name some best examples or do you think there is a best practice out there where clubs really improved also their fan engagement because I feel they are also in a lot of small leagues there are very traditional clubs with a lot of fans.

But over the years they phased out a bit and they don't go to the stadium that often as earlier and something like that. So is there a good approach to on a low cost basis, drive fan engagement, maybe also with a new technology arising?

**James O'Neill - 26:04**

Yeah, I think clubs that do it really well, they engage with these fan community, fan messaging boards and fan groups and fan communities.

I think the clubs that really they provide platforms to listen to their fans, and I'm not saying give them input into the overall actual club, have their voices seen and heard, I think is really, really important.

I think that's something, trying to think of examples of clubs yeah, examples of clubs off the top of my head.

Arsenal is one that do a really good job on that level.

But also, I think you see more and more clubs now involving either fans, i.e.

personalities that have their own communities and following that are maybe more influences,

involving them marketing campaigns, kit launches, things like that.

But also, on the other side, clubs are now looking at involving just, actually, know, people within local businesses that around the stadium, for example, or the restaurant owner that owns the place that all fans go to before the game and is maybe not celebrity. He or she is a celebrity within the community and is a really important part of the community.

So I think now clubs diving deeper into the actual roots and DNA where the club has been before and giving the actual core fan a lot more exposure and a lot bigger of a voice. There's probably endless examples out there. I've only really mentioned Arsenal.

It's the first one that comes to the top of my head because I'm thinking campaigns and stuff that I've seen in my mind. But yeah, that's what I would say that.

**Tim Schaaf - 28:25**

Okay, sounds very good, actually you took away my next question because that would have been to ask what types of partnerships with like local businesses or something could have a positive impact. Maybe, again, one question in a different direction.

Are there any particular markets or demographics - You already mentioned it in the beginning that like the Bundesliga is doing a really great job with implementing players from all around the world; Obviously leads also to having fans all around the world, e.g. now Bayern with Minjae Kim now, but are there markets which are still under tapped, especially by smaller leagues in which they can build their fanbase?

**James O'Neill - 29:25**

Yeah, I still think Asia and North America is typically done really, really well. I think there's big

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opportunity in South America, especially the bigger, I guess let's call it, the bigger football nations there. So Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, for example.

I think there's still a lot of exciting opportunity.

There's still a lot of exciting opportunity there for sure. I'm trying to think of elsewhere.

And Europe is another one. It's done pretty well.

I think South America is one. The Middle East is interesting.

I don't think anyone's necessarily cracked that yet.

A lot of people are looking at it and trying different things, but it's mainly I think there's still a lot to learn within that Middle East football market before clubs can really say they're tapping into it effectively.

I certainly think there's a lot more scope and potential in South America.

### **Tim Schaaf - 31:04**

So, thank you very much.

There would be just one question left but maybe you also need some time for that and you can also send it to me in hindsight.

But do you think there's sport or maybe also really innovative small league which is doing like a really good job in marketing? Which like really expands really quickly and is growing really strong?

### **James O'Neill - 31:35**

I think that two of the examples you mentioned, the Kings League and Baller League are doing an amazing job. Kings League especially, and I only say that because I followed it more and it's a little bit more established than Baller League. I think they have done amazing job at creating a

really new but relevant football platform and by that I not a 11-a-side but smaller sided with some innovative rules and things but not loads and loads of gimmicks. The football product ultimately is really strong. The level is still really strong.

And I think they've really effectively tapped into, one, that South American market, like I mentioned, where there's a big opportunity, but also tapped into different demographics than, let's traditional football, because they've used streamers, esports players, influencers in a really in a really authentic way.

They've created a format which resonates with a really broad younger hungry audience and subsequently because of that they've been able to tap into loads and loads of different relevant commercial brands partners operating in that space.

For me they do a really do a really, really good job.

**Tim Schaaf - 33:27**

OK, perfect, I'm very sorry.

Now you have another meeting which overran again five minutes.

**OFF-BOARDING/PERSONAL TALK**

**James O'Neill - 33:34**

No, it's no problem at all.

I have a little bit of a nice kind of break between now 40 minutes between now and the next one.

So it's fine. But yeah, any other questions, you know, feel free to let me But hope that was helpful and useful for you.

**Tim Schaaf - 33:50**

Yeah, very much so.

Very so. Thank you very we're still at not the earliest stages but still in the process of figuring out what we can recommend to smaller leagues and how they are able to grow.

So thank you much.

It was really interesting.

**James O'Neill - 34:13**

Perfect.

No problem at all.

Maybe another time we can talk bit more specifically about what we're doing with the club in Cascais.

**Tim Schaaf - 34:24**

It would be really nice to hear if you have time left we can also do it now

**James O'Neill - 34:27**

Yeah, I can you a little bit about it now.

We've now involved majority shareholders club.

They're currently in division 6. Yeah, I mean the level is the level but for us it's not a concern right now because it's a long-term project and there's really good people in there from a technical and performance perspective especially, so good coaches.

With a lot of experience in the program but also good players for that level; the club is unique in that it has its first theme but it also has play like a pro program which is actually a revenue generator for them so there's no fun little skeletons the closet.

It's of course a D6 club so I'm not saying that we're walking into seven figures of revenue

immediately. For a D6 club, it's really impressive on that level what they do and how it.

There's a lot to like for us in that respect. Proximity to Lisbon, location, as you know Tim, being based there.

It's an amazing place.

There's a lot of potential, we think.

We're going to be working basically operationally across the club with the people on the ground club itself. Our plan is to help the club progress through the professional leagues. A big milestone is Division 2 of course, Primera Liga would be amazing, but if we can, in the next 5-6 years, help the club to get to that Division 2 level, that would be amazing. It's going to take a lot of work, a lot of investment, a lot of infrastructure to be built not only internally from a brand perspective, but also structurally in terms of facilities, location.

Which we're busy with at the minute, but we're already getting a lot of interest from a commercial level, from a partnership level.

So we're close to signing a, yeah, basically first partner agreement with a brand called MEYBA.

So they were the first kit sponsor and partner of FC Barcelona.

**Tim Schaaf - 37:10**

Yeah, I know them. I had to do something with them at Prematch.

We tried to do something with them, but I think it didn't work out.

**James O'Neill - 37:12**

So yeah, it's a really exciting project.

It's a really exciting project and the brand of the content and the marketing is something we're looking at very closely because they're already doing it, doing quite a good job but without any

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real brand strategy and direction and a lot of the questions you listed out and asked me also asked really relevant in terms of the questions that we're also thinking about how can we as a smaller club leverage our position Cascais football club, location, community. Also access basically anything that we can get in terms of players, staff. We can actually provide access that a lot of clubs a lot of other clubs can't, so how can we use that to our advantage grow engagement, grow following, bring more brands in and bring them board.

So yeah, I can send some stuff offline and have a look at it.

Maybe there's something we can also look at in terms of different projects with club, as it's coincidence that you're based not too far away.

But you have any questions on that any time, give me a shout.

And if there's anything else I can help with, Yeah, just let me know.

### **Tim Schaaf - 38:59**

Thank you very much! Is it the GDS Cascais?

### **James O'Neill - 39:04**

Yes, that's right.

### **Tim Schaaf - 39:06**

I found the page.

Maybe we'll get to catch a game.

We're just here for four more weeks, unfortunately.

But let's see.

**James O'Neill - 39:18**

Yeah, perfect.

I will... Yeah, I think maybe second week in December I might be back out there again.

So, something like that could work.

Either way, we'll be able to get you to a game before then.

**Tim Schaaf - 39:34**

Let know and thank you very much for your time.

It was really helpful and impressive stuff that you're doing there.

**Justus Anton Pranger - 39:42**

Thank you very much.

Appreciate it.

**James O'Neill - 39:45**

No worries guys.

Thank you.

Enjoy the weekend.

**Justus Anton Pranger - 39:48**

Enjoy weekend.

Bye bye.

Take care.

### **Interview 6: Philipp Ostsieker**

Philipp Ostsieker is a product manager and consultant (MBA) specializing in digital transformation for creative businesses. With a focus on implementing change, enhancing efficiency, and unlocking new business potential, he excels at navigating complex environments and aligning diverse stakeholders to achieve impactful outcomes.

As the founder of Transform Sports, Ostsieker is dedicated to accelerating digital innovation in sports. His organization advises selected startups and tech companies, connecting them with prominent sports business organizations to create mutual value and drive technological advancement in the industry.

The interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams in German, his native language, to ensure clarity and accuracy of his insights, minimizing the risk of information loss due to translation. On request, an English transcript can be provided.

#### **Tim Schaaf - 01:36**

Hallo Philipp. Hörst du uns?

#### **Philipp Ostsieker - 01:42**

Hallo miteinander.

Ich höre euch, ich sehe euch und ihr seht mich hoffentlich gleich auch.

#### **Justus Anton Pränger - 01:48**

Ja, optimal. Vielen, vielen Dank für deine Zeit, dass du das einrichten konntest.

Freut uns sehr.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 01:51**

Ja, gerne, freut mich auch.

Danke für die Anfrage.

**Tim Schaaf - 02:00**

Ja, klar.

Ich glaube, du kannst uns ja weiterhelfen.

Ich habe einmal mein AI-Bot mit drin, der das Ganze hier transkribiert für unsere Masterarbeit.

Ich hoffe, dass das okay ist.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 02:14**

Das ist in Ordnung. Das ist schlau.

**Tim Schaaf - 02:17**

Ja, also, weil mit dem dauert dann so eine halbe Stunde Interview, nur noch eine Stunde, anderthalb zu transkribieren.

Ich glaube, sonst sitzt man da ja mal einen halben Tag dran.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 02:25**

Ich erinnere mich grob.

**Tim Schaaf - 02:34**

Einmal eine kurze Intro zu, warum wir hier heute sitzen.

Genau, ich bin Tim, das ist Justus.

Wir schreiben zusammen an einer Masterarbeit gerade hier am Sportlehrstuhl an der NOVA in Lissabon über das Thema, wie man es schafft, kleine Ligen kompetitiver und attraktiver zu machen.

Das heißt, Es geht jetzt nicht um Ligen wie Portugal, Belgien, die ja so knapp unter den Top 5 sind, sondern es geht wirklich eher um Schweden, Georgien, Albanien, die Richtung, sage ich jetzt mal.

Und wir wollen quasi drei Forschungsfragen beantworten.

Das ist einmal, was können kleinere Ligen von den größeren lernen Best Practices-mäßig. Dann ist das zweite. Wie können kleinere Ligen durch Innovationen, Technologien, USPs kreieren, um eben eigenständig erfolgreich zu sein?

Und das dritte ist dann, das einmal anzuwenden auf die schwedische Liga.

Genau.

Und in dem Sinne gab es auch diesen Interviewleitfaden, den ich dir ja vorher schon einmal zugeschickt habe. Ist aber auch kein Problem, wenn du keine Zeit hattest, schon mal reinzugucken, aus dem ich jetzt grob mal anfangen würde, wenn das für dich okay ist.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 03:44**

Das ist für mich okay. Vielen Dank.

**Tim Schaaf - 03:45**

Perfekt.

Gut, dann starten wir mal mit einer ganz einfachen, ein bisschen auch schon fast Definitionsfrage rein.

Was sind denn für dich Bereiche oder würdest du generell zustimmen, dass kleinere Ligen mehr Freiraum haben, vielleicht auch Innovationen auszuprobieren, auch mal was zu testen?

Und in welchen Bereichen könnte das zum Beispiel der Fall sein?

**Philipp Ostsieker - 04:12**

Also mehr Freiraum im Sinne von es gibt weniger historisch gewachsene Strukturen oder Abhängigkeiten, auf jeden Fall. Mehr Freiraum natürlich im Sinne von ich habe finanzielle Möglichkeiten etwas voranzuschieben, tendenziell weniger.

Also das würde ich jetzt als Perspektive noch mit reinnehmen, aber ich glaube grundsätzlich Wir reden auch nur, wenn ich das sicherheitshalber frage, wir reden jetzt nur über Fußball-Ligen oder reden wir über Sport-Ligen generell?

**Tim Schaaf - 04:46**

Also wir werden die Ergebnisse anwenden nur auf Fußball-Ligen.

Aber wenn du jetzt Beispiele hast aus anderen Ligen, die eine Anwendung im Fußball finden könnten, dann gerne.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 04:58**

Okay, alles klar.

Aber dann versuche ich immer wieder zum Fußball zurückzufinden, das fällt mir nicht schwer.

Wenn ich dann mal ausschere, ist es auch kein Drama.

Also ja, ich glaube, was kann spannend sein?

Natürlich erstmal fernab von allen vielleicht digitalen oder technologischen Innovationen fängt es natürlich gegebenenfalls mit einfachen Dingen an, wie leicht veränderte Spielregeln, veränderte

Turnierformate.

Von Playoffs beispielsweise bis hin zu unterschiedlichen Auf- und Abstiegsregelungen sind das ja glaube ich auch Sachen, wenn man auf die ein oder andere mittelgroße Liga guckt oder wenn man sich Holland und Belgien anschaut.

Sowohl mit Playoffs als auch gegebenenfalls mit länderübergreifenden Formaten.

Ich glaube, das hat man dann aus Liechtenstein in den Clubs in der Schweiz zum Teil.

Oder US-Fußball.

Ich glaube, durch solche Geschichten, was Spielregeln angeht, was Turnierformate angeht, ist es sicherlich eine Sache.

Da bin ich jetzt weniger bei klassischen Ligen, aber natürlich dann in Richtung Fan-Engagement teilweise. Wenn ich jetzt beispielsweise sage, ich habe jetzt wirklich noch mal ein Testfeld für neue Technologien, da sind wir dann natürlich, das Beispiel habt ihr wahrscheinlich auch schon durchgekaut, bei Baller League und Co., wo man jetzt natürlich sagt, ja das ist keine klassische Fußballliga, aber es ist ja eine Produktvariation vom klassischen Fußball. Wo immer noch der gleiche Sport betrieben wird, aber andererseits auch die Möglichkeit größer ist, Dinge auszuprobieren. Da ist die Toleranz größer bei der Zielgruppe, weil die doch auch n Stück weit jünger & fokussierter sind. Also die 3 Überschriften: Spielregeln, Turnierformate, Fan-Engagement

**Tim Schaaf - 06:56**

Okay, perfekt.

Wie wichtig würdest du sagen, ist es denn für so eine kleine Liga, eine wirklich klare Identität zu entwickeln, die dann vielleicht eben auf Innovationen beruhen kann, einfach um auch mehr Visibility, mehr Aufmerksamkeit zu bekommen?

Und gibt es da für dich ein Beispiel dazu eventuell?

**Philipp Ostsieker - 07:18**

Also ich glaube, dass es definitiv hilft, weil am Ende ist natürlich die Differenzierung über den Sport selbst als Kern natürlich erstmal schwierig, weil am Ende ist das ja erstmal, sag ich mal, Professionalität, Qualität. Du wirst ja in bestimmten kleinen Ligen, wirst du ja nie sagen können, ich spiele jetzt hier auf einem Niveau wie in der Champions League oder ähnliches. Das heißt, das Thema Identität über irgendeinen Treiber ist glaube ich schon wichtig. Ich meine, dieses Thema Kings League und Co hatten wir, ich glaube, was in den USA spannend war, bei diesem Thema NBA G League, wo man ja auch noch mal so eine Art Experimentierfeld hatte, auch für die eine oder andere neue Regel beispielsweise. Und klar, du hast dann natürlich, das ist für uns jetzt weiter weg, du hast dann sicherlich sowas wie MLS, wo du sagst, du hast einerseits irgendwie den europäischen Fußball dort abgebildet, hast aber in dem Sinne amerikanische Regeln durch Salary Cap oder Franchise Modelle. Und dann hast du wenn du auf regionaler Ebene guckst bei kleinen Ligen vor allem regionale Markenidentität, wo du vielleicht sagen kannst, das ist gar nicht vielleicht auf Länderebene, aber wenn ich mein Interesse anschau, ich schau mir auch gern Champions League an, ich schau mir aber auch sehr gerne irgendwie die Oberliga Hamburg an, weil ich weiß, da gibt es, so banal das jetzt klingt, aber da gibt es, das ist ein Niveau, was ordentlich genug ist, sportlich.

Ich weiß, es gibt aber nur Derbys am Ende des Tages.

Also da spielen irgendwie Nachbarstadtteile gegeneinander.

Das sind traditionelle Stadien, die es schon lange gibt.

Und so hat man, man kennt vielleicht noch Personen dort, Und so hat man noch mal einen anderen Bezug, nicht durch Innovation, aber durch eine Art von regionalem Markenkern.

**Tim Schaaf - 09:10**

Ja, und vielleicht, du hast jetzt Kings League schon ein, zwei Mal erwähnt.

Könntest du dir tatsächlich vorstellen, dass die Implementierung dieser Ligen, die ja vor allem bei jungen Zielgruppen super, super gut greift, dass das tatsächlich in kleineren Ligen dazu führt, dass die, um diese Zielgruppen zu bekommen, Sachen davon versuchen aufzugreifen und wenn ja, was?

**Philipp Ostsieker - 09:37**

Ich glaube, was du ja sowieso machen kannst, ist natürlich generell, du kannst natürlich sagen, ich lasse den Sport und Formate und Regeln, lasse ich erstmal so und ich gehe wirklich mal ernsthaft aufs Thema Community beispielsweise.

Das ist ja das, was, also erstmal so die vermeintlich softe Dosierung, wo ich niemanden in der Bestandsfanggruppen verärgere oder ähnliches vor den Kopf stoße, aber wo ich einfach sage, ich versuche mir schon, ich versuche stärker Geschichten zu erzählen, ich versuche stärker Persönlichkeiten zu entwickeln und auch die Clubs dabei zu unterstützen.

Ich glaube, da ist es sehr wichtig und interessant, wie sieht sich jetzt auch eine Liga, also wie sieht sich so ein Liga-Verband im Verhältnis zu seinen Clubs, weil das ist ja, das hat man ja selbst bis hin zur DFL oder so, wo ja relativ häufig noch die, also ein ganz anderes Niveau, aber wo man häufig ja noch die Diskussion hat, naja, viele Clubs, selbst auf einem hohen Niveau, sind gerade mit digitalen Innovationen ja immer noch überfordert, wenn man ganz ehrlich ist.

Dafür musst du jetzt nicht in Albanien sein, sondern das ist ja bis in die deutsche Fußball-Bundesliga-Mittelschicht, ist das ja teilweise.

Und wo ich es schon interessant finde, wie begreift sich eine Liga oder wie begreift sich ein Verband, begreift er sich als Innovationstreiber oder begreift er sich wirklich als Dienstleister der

Klubs beispielsweise.

Also ich glaube, das ist ja auch in diesen Ich bin da wirklich kein Experte, aber bei Baller League und Kings League ist ja auch selbst da die Differenzierung teilweise interessant.

Wie nachhaltig ist das Commitment beispielsweise dieser Teamköpfe?

Wie sehr sind die Protagonisten oder Stakeholder investiert?

Wie lange committen sie sich?

Wie sehr haben sie Lust, sich in den Vordergrund zu spielen?

Wie gut kann ich als Team eine Identität aufbauen?

Wechseln da jedes Jahr die Spieler durch?

Oder habe ich da quasi über die Jahre, ja, baue ich Loyalität auf und so weiter?

Das sind alles so Punkte, die ich relativ spannend finde und wo glaube ich auch, ja, wie gesagt, eine Liga sich eben begreifen muss im Sinne von, helfe ich bei, also klar kann ich als Liga sagen, ich ändere den Turniermodus oder ich ändere den Spielmodus und sage, ich spiele jetzt nur noch zweimal eine halbe Stunde.

Mag sein.

Ich glaube, du hast dann irgendwann, ich weiß nicht bis zu welchem Punkt, FIFA-Regeln gelten.

Das sind dann ja sicherlich, also das ist dann jetzt immer so ein bisschen vielleicht der Showstopper.

Aber nein, ich glaube, gerade bei diesen technologischen, digitalen Themen ist es sicherlich spannend, wer da im Lead ist, wer da die Dinge treibt und ob man sich da ob man als Verband oder Liga die Klubs mit an die Hand nimmt oder ob man die einfach loslaufen lässt und hofft, es kommt was Gutes dabei rum.

**Tim Schaaf - 12:38**

Das bezieht sich meistens auf die Rahmenbedingungen oder vielleicht auch schon drüber hinaus mit Off-Field-Performance, also mit Fan-Engagement, Community-Building. Glaubst du, es gibt auch Innovationen, vielleicht in Richtung Scouting, Videoanalyse, die kleinen Ligen helfen können, wirklich die Lücke sportlicher Qualität zu den großen Ligen zu schließen? Oder auf der anderen Seite wird die durch Technologien vielleicht sogar größer, weil eben die großen Clubs das gleiche Scouting betreiben wie die kleinen und sie gar nicht mehr durch die menschliche Komponente rausstechen können.

### **Philipp Ostsieker - 13:22**

Ja, gute Frage. Einerseits würde ich sagen, die eine oder andere Technologie wird ja schon durchaus günstiger über die Jahre.

Alleine wenn du dir jetzt generative KI anschaust, du hast ja schon eine gewisse Niedrigschwelligkeit von einigen Technologien, nicht von allen, aber von einigen.

Die Frage ist natürlich am Ende trotzdem auch immer, wo nehmen auch kleinere Ligen oder Klubs die Manpower her für solche Geschichten, weil auch da weiß ich, auch auf professionellem Niveau gibt es, also gibt es auch, aber gibt es nicht immer ein Erkenntnisproblem, sondern wirklich ein Umsetzungs- und Priorisierungsproblem.

Ich glaube, dass kleinere Ligen sich wirklich differenzieren können, wenn sie sagen, sie gehen im Vergleich zu großen, sehr traditionellen Ligen oder Vereinen, gehen sie sehr unternehmerisch vor. Also haben wirklich auch Leute mit drin, die von Dingen auch tatsächlich Ahnung haben so banal das klingt. Ich glaube, dass das ein Punkt ist.

In puncto Agilität und Schnelligkeit kann man sicherlich einiges wettmachen.

Gleichzeitig muss man natürlich sagen, wenn jetzt eine kleine Liga anfängt, sich beim Thema Scouting einzusetzen und versucht Meter zu machen, weiß ich nicht. Ich glaube, man kann den

Abstand halten. Ob man ihn verkürzt, wäre ich persönlich skeptisch.

Du hast gesagt, du hast die Niedrigschwelligkeit der Technologien.

Du wirst trotzdem immer wieder ... Ich sage jetzt mal, eine Fußball-Bundesliga macht einen Tech-Barter mit AWS.

Ich glaube, das ist relativ schwer nachzustellen.

Das macht dann die albanische Liga vielleicht mit einem unbekannteren Start-up und kommt auf ein gewisses Niveau und behält eine Relevanz.

Ich würde fast sagen, dass es sich am Ende einigermaßen aufwiegt.

**Tim Schaaf - 15:22**

Wenn dem der Fall ist, dann kann ja das Wachstum, wie wir am Anfang schon darüber geredet haben, in den kleinen Ligen eigentlich eher von außerhalb des Platzes kommen als innerhalb.

Was würdest du denn sagen, was sind so Best Practices, kann jetzt irgendwo aus dem Sport sein, könnte theoretisch auch ein Unternehmen sein, wie man es schafft mit begrenzten Ressourcen, wirklich innovative vielleicht auch Wege im Bereich Fan Engagement zu gehen, also dass vielleicht die Experience im Stadion verbessert, dass man die Leute einfach besser bindet.

So in die Richtung.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 15:59**

Ich glaube, dass ich gerade kleinere Ligen oder Clubs noch mehr als Plattform oder als Community sehen müssen.

Das ist ja auch, weiß ich nicht, wenn ich das jetzt nicht Amateurbereiche, aber wenn ich mir jetzt St. Pauli anschau, die werden ja für ganz vieles abgefeiert, was andere gemacht haben. Also für Viva con Aqua oder die irgendwie Millerntor Gallery oder so.

Das sind ja alles Sachen, die haben die nicht selbst entwickelt.

Sie haben aber Menschen aus ihrem Umfeld, also aus ihrem Ökosystem, Unternehmern, Fans, Mitgliedern, haben sie irgendwie eine Plattform gegeben und haben relativ früh ein offenes Ohr gehabt im Sinne von, was ist hier gerade angesagt, was entsteht gerade irgendwie in meiner Subkultur oder so.

Also ich glaube, ich glaube, dass das schon relativ klug ist und weil ich eben umgekehrt immer noch so auf dem Dorf teilweise sehe, okay, es ist schon noch ein ziemlicher Konkurrenzkampf zwischen vielen Kleinen und ich glaube, dass das wirklich falsch ist.

Also ich glaube, dass da sich viele etablierte Vereine im Sport immer noch lange schwer getan haben, sich da zu öffnen und dem zu zeigen, hey, ich bin jetzt hier nicht einfach die alleinige Nummer eins in der Stadt oder in der Region, ja, es gibt hier ganz viele andere, die können auch was, sei es Universitäten, sei es Start-ups, was auch immer.

Ich glaube, darauf will ich hinaus, die meisten Vereine oder Verbände werden zu ganz vielen Sachen nie selbst in der Lage sein. Die Probleme da draußen oder die Themen draußen werden komplexer und vielfältiger.

Das heißt, ich glaube, man muss noch früher sich öffnen.

Und eben auch zu schauen, wie kann ich Dinge miteinander verheiraten, bevor sie dann vielleicht auch schon so ein gewisses Produkt oder Marktreifegrade erreicht haben, sondern wirklich schon früher zu sagen, ich arbeite mit Universitäten zusammen, ich gebe jungen Unternehmern eine Chance, ich binde meine Fans auf eine gewisse Art und Weise ein, um dann schon viel früher sagen zu können, naja, das kostet mir nicht wirklich was, sondern ich habe hier, ich Sorge hier für eine gute Partnerdynamik und ich kann hier schon Lösungen einsetzen, die ich vielleicht, wenn ich das jetzt hier nicht machen würde, in drei Jahren woanders teuer einkaufen müsste.

**Tim Schaaf - 18:11**

Okay, das heißt, um das einmal kurz zusammenzufassen, man könnte auch vieles lösen über, sagen wir mal, eine neue Art, ist jetzt ein BWL-Begriff, Stakeholder-Managements.

Also, dass man sagt, du gehst viel in Partnerschaften, arbeitest lokal viel zusammen, da kann man ja dann auch wiederum eine Story drum erzählen und bindet auch Fans mit ein, quasi.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 18:34**

100%. Davon gehe ich fest aus, weil, wie gesagt, auch da ist es dann trotzdem nach wie vor so, selbst wenn du jetzt jemanden hast, der sehr viele Themen sieht, du wirst es, glaube ich, du wirst dir immer schwer tun, es selbst ganz alleine umzusetzen.

Selbst wenn du dir jetzt keine großen Fußballclubs anguckst, sondern schaust dir die Top 5 der Handball-Bundesliga an.

Selbst auch da, da gibt es vielleicht einen Leiter Marketing.

Der macht bestimmt seinen Job gut, aber der ist nicht in der Lage, sich mit komplexen Fan-Engagement-Themen auseinanderzusetzen, aus meiner Sicht.

Das heißt, ich glaube persönlich, du wirst es nur über gute Partnerschaften hinkriegen.

Du wirst es hinkriegen, indem du dich in deiner Community, sage ich mal, lokal austauschst, aber auch in deiner Community, vielleicht auch international.

Also warum sagen solche Ligen liegen in gewissen Regionen nicht, wir arbeiten bei bestimmten Themen zusammen.

Ich weiß das von einem Partner, mit dem wir arbeiten.

Die machen im Prinzip sehr banal SSO für Fußballklubs oder für Klubs generell.

Die haben dann das Single-Signon vom HSV, vom 1. FC Köln und so weiter.

Und die machen das aber in kleineren Ligen, also in der Schweiz, in Belgien, gibt es dann quasi eine Liga-ID. Also wo du wirklich sagst, okay, die Liga übernimmt das und die Liga versucht diese Innovation im Prinzip auszurollen als Dienstleister seinen Clubs gegenüber.

Und das kannst du natürlich auf so einer Liga-Club-Ebene oder Verbands-Club-Ebene sehen. Du kannst es aber auch sehen im Sinne von, naja, warum sagt man nicht in kleinen Ländern, irgendwie Südosteuropa oder wo auch immer, wir haben hier irgendwie eine Innovations-Community verbandsübergreifend oder so.

### **Tim Schaaf - 20:32**

Vielleicht einmal noch mal auf die Zukunft blickend.

Es gibt ja jetzt auch vieles, also generell ist ja das Thema Innovation nicht nur im Sport, sondern im Business generell auch ein ziemliches Buzzword-Thema bis jetzt, wo dann viel mit AI und Blockchain und NFTs um sich geworfen wird, ohne dass 90% der Leute überhaupt wissen, worum es geht.

Jetzt gibt es zum Beispiel auch in der Serie A schon diese Digital Collectibles von jedem Tor, wo der Ball dann immer eingetütet wird und dann kann man ihn online kaufen.

Glaubst du, dass diese ganzen Technologien, Virtual Reality vielleicht noch dazu genommen, dass das jetzt schon in absehbarer Zeit wirklich einen Impact haben kann auf den Fußball? Oder glaubst du, dass viele Bevölkerungsgruppen oder die breite Masse, wo die Fans ja dann oft auch dazugehören, dass es für die einfach noch zu früh kommt, dass die da auch noch vielleicht zu skeptisch dem gegenüber eingestellt.

### **Philipp Ostsieker - 21:39**

Also Stand jetzt glaube ich, ich finde die Themen total toll persönlich, aber ich glaube, dass das

Stand jetzt noch zu früh kommt. Also auch wenn wir reden ja schon seit, also auch das ist ja, ist ja wirklich witzig. Wir reden ja auch schon seit zehn Jahren wirklich über irgendwie Mixed Reality und sowas.

Es gibt ja die Showcases und so weiter.

Also weiß nicht, gab es ja ganz früh, wie hießen die?

NextVR glaube ich, die mit der NBA viel gemacht haben oder mit der NFL.

Also die Cases gibt es ja alle.

Aber ich glaube, du hast ja leider so viele Hürden, du hast irgendwie eine Hardware-Hürde, erstmal auf Fan-Seite, glaube ich.

Also klar, auch da die Hardware wird günstiger, grundsätzlich, klar.

Aber du hast das Thema, du hast, gut, das ist jetzt sehr auf Deutschland bezogen, das mag in anderen Ländern, mag die Technologieoffenheit ein bisschen größer sein.

Das mag wieder ein deutsches Thema sein, aber ihr wisst, was ich meine.

Ich glaube, dass die Anwendungsfälle finde ich, es gibt ein paar, aber die sind glaube ich nicht so, dass ich sie in der Breite sehe.

Du hast offen gesagt, selbst auch im Profifußball, du hast immer noch das Thema, dass es auch da immer noch stark die Mentalität gibt im Sinne von, was bringt es mir?

Also wie kann ich damit jetzt schnell Geld verdienen?

Also in einer Branche, das muss man ja auch sagen, und das ist glaube ich schon noch international noch so, in einer Branche, die davon lebt, dass die TV-Rechte über Jahre einfach gestiegen sind, die davon lebt, dass es immer von irgendjemandem Sponsoring Geld gibt. Das bessert sich jetzt fairerweise gerade, weil manches eben stagniert, aber die immer noch bei sehr, sehr vielen guten Tech-Dienstleistern sagen, bevor ich deine Lösung integriere, gib mir erstmal ein bisschen Geld.

Du kannst ja bei uns Sponsor werden. Deswegen sind solche Nummern immer schwierig und bei so einem Thema wie Virtual Reality sehe ich es immer so, es kostet Geld und es bringt erstmal kein Geld. Also du kannst einen coolen Showcase, also sehr banal, du kannst einen coolen Showcase bauen und das war glaube ich die letzten Jahre, wir arbeiten mit Wolfsburg eng zusammen, die relativ progressiv unterwegs sind, irgendwie im Bereich Metaverse, im Bereich Gaming oder E-Sports.

Du hast immer viele coole Sachen gemacht, aber wo du eben auch merkst, es ist nett, du kommst an andere Zielgruppen ran, was sicherlich immer ein gutes Argument ist, aber es ist kein kurzfristiger Erlöstreiber.

Also anders als bei einem Thema, auch mit viel Buzz verbunden sicherlich, aber anders als bei einem Thema wie generative KI, wo du zumindest eine Niedrigschwelligkeit hast und das Potenzial in Richtung Effizienz zu gehen und Kostenersparnis. Bei mixed reality bin ich da tendenziell skeptisch.

### **Tim Schaaf - 24:36**

Du hast gerade schon angeschnitten, es gibt ja auch noch darüber hinaus, wir haben ja jetzt sehr über das nahe Umfeld des Fußballs gesprochen, es gibt hier noch die Seite Broadcasting, Streaming, Sponsoring-Einnahmen, diese ganze Seite, wo es jetzt in letzter Zeit auch immer dazu übergeht, dass es immer mehr Streaming-Services gibt.

Es wird immer teurer für Fans Fußball zu verfolgen.

Jetzt gibt es da schon einige Ligen, Premier League denkt glaube ich da auch seit Ewigkeiten drüber nach, haben es aber noch nicht umgesetzt, auch mal vielleicht auf einen wirklich eigenen Streaming-Dienst zu setzen, weil das einerseits für die Fans günstiger sein könnte und gleichzeitig mehr Revenue bringen könnte, es quasi ohne Mittelman auskommen würde.

Denkst du, dass das für, ich meine, und es funktioniert bei Formel 1, NFL, whatever, funktioniert es ja schon. Denkst du, dass das auch in Massen der Ligen funktionieren könnte, nachhaltig? Oder wenn sich zum Beispiel mehrere Ligen zusammenschließen würden, sowas zu versuchen? Oder siehst du da nicht so Potenzial?

**Philipp Ostsieker - 25:43**

Ich finde das schon spannend.

Es wird sich ja in Deutschland beispielsweise zeigen, wie sich sowas wie Dyn entwickelt.

**Tim Schaaf - 25:48**

Genau, da kommt die Überlegung her.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 25:54**

Das wird sicherlich spannend.

Ich glaube, Stand jetzt funktioniert ja da gerade dieses Thema Handball sehr gut.

Bei den anderen ist es, wie ich es verstehe, noch etwas schleppend.

Aber ja, ich glaube, du musst möglichst gut die Zugänge zu deiner Sportart offen halten und niedrig halten.

Ich finde das Gegenteil, was im Fußball jetzt beispielsweise passiert, wo du wo du auch ganz viel Social-Media-Content auslässt, also ich finde, da ist man auch unglaublich unter, immer noch, man schöpft das Potenzial ja nicht im Ansatz aus, wie es irgendwie amerikanische Ligen machen, teilweise.

Dazu hat man irgendwie verschiedene Abos, die man haben muss.

Also ich finde, das ist in puncto, ja, Niedrigschwelligkeit oder Zugangsqualität ist es echt nicht

gut.

Und ich glaube, dass da durchaus kleinere Ligen, ob es jetzt überall Dyn ist oder ob es vielleicht, es gibt ja auch noch, weiß was, früher eine Zeit lang gab oder man macht es eben ganz alleine.

Da sehe ich auf jeden Fall Potenzial, das irgendwie weiterzudenken und da ist der grundsätzliche Ansatz von Dyn ja super. Ich glaube, jeder Sportbusiness Interessierte muss die Daumen drücken, dass die Geschichte funktioniert.

Das eine sind jetzt die normalen TV-Rechte, die da jetzt irgendwie genutzt werden.

Das andere ist ja schon nochmal dieser Trigger in Richtung Professionalisierung.

Ich weiß das irgendwie von der Hockeyliga, die mussten da ihre Vereinsleute überzeugen, dass die bei den TV-Aufnahmen die Trainingstore hinter dem Platz wegräumen. Gehört nicht despektierlich gemeint, aber gehört auch immer wieder zur Wahrheit dazu. Ich bin großer Innovationsenthusiast, aber es gehört immer wieder leider mit dazu, dass am Ende dann eben Dinge passieren, wo man als letztes dran denkt, dass die irgendeine Relevanz für so einen Innovation-Case haben sollten.

Naja, aber nichtsdestotrotz, das ändert nichts daran, dass ich da auf jeden Fall dran glaube, ob es jetzt über Dyn ist oder über was anderes, wo du wirklich sagst, ich habe ein Paket, was einfach zugänglich ist, was klar ist, was ein attraktives Pricing hat, wo man glaube ich sehr gezielt Partner einbinden kann.

Was sind die KPIs für Partner?

Ist es auf dem Niveau, wo wir über geringere Reichweiten reden - Sind es halt immer noch irgendwelche Ad-Impressions oder so? Oder reden wir über andere Modelle?

Also reden wir eher, ich weiß es jetzt nicht, über conversion-getriebene Sachen.

Also wo du eben eher sagst, ich versuche Leute aus meinem Kontext eher, ich weiß es nicht, auf einer Affiliate-Basis oder whatever, versuche ich auf eine andere Art und Weise zu konvertieren

und zu monetarisieren. Aber auch da mit einem Community-Gedanken und ich finde, das kann sowohl in, finde ich, sehr spitzen Sportarten funktionieren, aber das kann bestimmt auch gut auf einer Länderebene funktionieren.

**Tim Schaaf - 29:08**

Okay, vielleicht ganz kurz noch.

Denkst du, es gibt so ähnliche Bestrebungen und neue innovative Ansätze auch im Bereich Sponsoring oder generelle neue Revenue-Quellen?

Ich meine, wenn man das auch schafft, die finanzielle Perspektive der Ligen zu erhöhen spielt das ja auch wieder mit ein auf das Sportliche?

**Philipp Ostsieker - 29:29**

Absolut.

Also ich glaube, die muss es geben.

Da führt gar kein Weg dran vorbei.

Weil, ja, glaube, so dieses reine Aufmerksamkeits- und Reichweiten-Game, also man kann sich ja selbst bei sehr erfolgreichen Plattformen oder Apps, kann man sich irgendwie angucken, wie die TKPs sich entwickelt haben.

Ich glaube, dass man da wirklich mehr über transaktionsbasierte Sachen nachdenken muss. Und gegebenenfalls auch über Direkterlöse, aber dafür muss es halt auch attraktiv genug sein für.

Wirklich überlegen, was kann ich zusätzlich zu so nem reinen Spiel bieten, Experience darüber hinausgeht, dass ich mir einmal die Woche 60-90 Minuten einen Sport auf dem Platz angucke.

Also das ist ja das wonach wir regelmäßig suchen: Wie kann man Erlösmodelle bauen mit Start-up-Partnern, die wirklich in andere Richtung gehen? Und gerade ist es glaube ich noch so, das

Sponsoring ist halt oft noch so diese, ist immer noch so oft ein bisschen die Brückentechnologie. Also du brauchst schon immer noch wie so eine Art, also die Leute verstehen schon, dass es neue Sachen braucht. Es braucht dann immer noch so diese kurze Anschubfinanzierung von irgendeinem Sponsor.

Aber das ist natürlich die Hoffnung, dass wir in zwei, drei, vier, fünf Jahren, dass es deutlich normaler ist, dass es wirklich ganz andere, ganz andere Erlössäulen gibt also zumindest zusätzliche oder vielleicht noch mal eine echte mehr zusätzlich zu denen, die es jetzt aktuell gibt.

### **Tim Schaaf - 31:19**

Kannst du dir schon vorstellen, in welche Richtung das gehen könnte oder ist das früh?

Also gibt es da schon irgendwelche Trends aus anderen Sportarten, anderen Businesses, auf was sich was ableiten lässt oder?

### **Philipp Ostsieker - 31:33**

Klar, du kannst natürlich jetzt immer diese ganze die ganze Web3-Collectible-Nummer der letzten Jahre, die könntest du jetzt nehmen. Die hat sich in der Form de facto einfach noch nicht durchgesetzt. Also vielleicht bei den Beispielen, wie du es eben sagtest, vielleicht so ab Juventus Turin aufwärts.

Wir arbeiten mit einem Unternehmen zusammen, das White-Label-Job-Plattformen anbietet für Clubs. Da sind wir dann wieder bei einem lokalen oder regionalen Gedanken, wo du wirklich sagst, der Club macht wirklich, ich meine am Ende ist das ein Modell aus Verlagswesen früher. Aber wo du wirklich sagst, ich bin jetzt beispielsweise als ein Kunde von uns im TVB Stuttgart, solider Handball Bundesligist.

Der sagt, ich komme mit Werbeanzeigen und mit Bandenwerbung und freien Plätzen auf dem

Trikot, komme ich nicht mehr weiter.

Aber ich weiß, ich bin hart in der Region verankert.

Ich kenne die Leute alle.

Es gibt einen Wahnsinnsfachkräftemangel.

Den erleben irgendwie alle von klein bis groß.

Ich brauche vielleicht auch Sponsoring-Pakete, die nicht nur für den obersten Teil der Pyramide sind, sondern möchte vielleicht noch mehr Leute einsammeln.

Schaffen eine Bindungen über Schulpartnerschaften und so weiter und so fort.

Aber es ist auch keine Raketenwissenschaft.

Aber es ist eben so ein bisschen was anderes, wo sagt, ich reagiere auf einen demografischen Trend oder auf einen grundsätzlichen Trend. Ich glaube, das ist das zugrunde liegende dahinter: Ich löse ein Problem meiner Community. Das ist wirklich der Punkt, welche Probleme kann ich lösen. Das ist nicht mal mit technisch komplexen Problemen verbunden, sondern: So gibt es hier eine Lücke und kann ich da reingehen mit dem, was ich darstelle? Und ein anderes Thema, was wir noch haben, auch da finde ich, das kannst du regional gut lösen, ist so dieses Thema, im Englischen würde man jetzt sagen, irgendwie so, also shifting or managing or orchestrating purchasing power.

Das ist so ein bisschen was, wenn Asiaten am Münchner Flughafen ankommen, dann kriegen sie direkt irgendwie so ein Overlay Wir haben ein Smartphone oder ein Pop-Up mit allen Läden in München, wo du mit Alipay Plus zahlen kannst.

Wo Alipay dann sagt, wir sind kein Payment-Unternehmen, wir sind eigentlich Tourismusunternehmen.

Und die darüber kommen, ich habe eine Kraft und Reichweite, dass ich in der Lage bin, quasi diese Purchasing-Power gezielt irgendwo hinzuschieben.

Auch das finde ich jetzt schon ganz interessant, wo du ja auch sagen kannst, wir haben hier starke Partner, die haben nicht nur Werbepräsenzen, sondern die können diese Partnerschaft am Monatsende, am Quartalsende daran messen, wie viele Leute habe ich eigentlich durch sehr kluge Aktivierung wirklich zu ihnen geschoben. Beispiel:

Die albanische Liga hat jetzt irgendwie einen Premium-Deal mit Aldi und du sagst halt, wir haben jetzt hier einen Hinrunden-Vorteil, 10% mit Bundesliga-Pay oder was auch immer; Du hast quasi so eine Art Loyalty-Programm oder ähnliches, wo du aber sagst, du hast deinen Partner und schiebst die Leute dahin und kannst sagen, ich habe euch jetzt hier ganz gezielt eine klare Zielgruppe an sportaffinen Fans zwischen Alter X und Y hingeschickt und wir messen das nicht an einer Werbepräsenz, sondern wir messen das an Transaktionen beispielsweise.

### **Justus Anton Pränger - 35:41**

Ich glaube, um ganz kurz das einzuschieben, so was Ähnliches hat hier, glaube ich, auch Benfica haben wir hier gemerkt mit allen möglichen Partnern, dass sich teilweise sogar Leute, die nicht mehr Benfica-Fans sind, irgendwie in eine Benfica-Mitgliedschaft holen, um genau die Vorteile bekommen.

### **Philipp Ostsieker - 35:57**

Genau, das ist hier genau mit Dienstleister.

Das ist echt ein super spannender Case.

Also die haben es ja wirklich genauso gemacht, dass du sagst, du hast dann, glaube ich, in der Benfica-App hinterlegst du im Prinzip deine EC-Karte oder Kreditkarte.

Ich habe immer noch nicht verstanden, wie die es in der Anzahl hinbekommen haben.

Das ist eine kluge Technologie, aber du musst natürlich auch wahnsinnig viel Vertrieb machen, dass du da wirklich von Emirates bis hin zum Tapas-Laden im Vorort von Lissabon irgendwie die Leute mit drin hast oder so. Aber ich finde das total smart.

Da hat es jetzt echt ein großer Club gemacht, aber ich glaube auch, dass das kleinere Ligen/clubs übernehmen könnten auf einem Small Scale.

Habt ihr selbst mal genutzt?

**Tim Schaaf - 37:03**

Leider nicht.

Wir haben auch überlegt, uns mal so eine Mitgliedschaft zu holen generell.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 37:13**

Verständlich.

Aber das hätte mich mal interessiert, weil wir tatsächlich mit dem Unternehmen, was dahinter steckt, sind wir auch in Gesprächen.

Ich finde, wenn der Case wirklich so funktioniert und ist, wie Sie damit durch die Lande ziehen, ist es schon sehr gut.

**Tim Schaaf - 37:44**

Gut, vielen, vielen Dank.

Vielleicht in einem letzten Satz von dir, was glaubst du ist die wichtigste Technologie, die es für den Fußball in den nächsten zehn Jahren geben wird?

**Philipp Ostsieker - 37:59**

AI definitiv. Wir können jetzt noch sagen, in welcher Ausprägung, aber ich glaube fest daran, wir haben es doch jetzt zu unserem Thema gemacht, deswegen bin ich ein bisschen befangen, aber ich glaube, nein, ich glaube sowohl, also wenn man dann jetzt wieder den Schirm breiter aufspannt sowohl für Themen im sportlichen Bereich als auch im nicht sportlichen Bereich ist es glaube ich super spannend, gerade für die vielen Clubs auch beispielsweise, die Probleme haben gute Leute zu finden, die eher teilweise kleinere Teams haben als größere Teams quasi hinter dem Team, wäre meine Einschätzung.

**Tim Schaaf - 38:41**

Es war extrem hilfreich.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 38:44**

Ja, hoffe ich, dass es ein bisschen spannend war und wünsche euch ganz viel Erfolg bei dem, macht.

**Tim Schaaf - 38:55**

Vielen Dank.

**Philipp Ostsieker - 38:56**

Cooler Thema und wenn sonst mal irgendwas ist, ihr irgendwie Austausch wollt oder so, meldet euch gerne jederzeit. Bye Bye.

**Tim Schaaf - 39:06**

Machen wir.

Tschau tschau.

### **Interview 7: Martin Carlsson-Wall**

Martin Carlsson-Wall is a distinguished professor of sports management and the director of the Center for Sports & Business at the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), widely regarded as the leading business school in Sweden. With extensive expertise in sports management and a particular focus on the Swedish football ecosystem, Carson-Wall brings a deep understanding of the strategic and operational aspects of sports organizations in smaller leagues.

His academic background and practical insights make him an invaluable resource for exploring the challenges and opportunities facing Swedish football and similar leagues worldwide. The interview, conducted via Microsoft Teams on November 13th, lasted approximately 45 minutes and offered critical perspectives on the dynamics of sports management in a Swedish context.

### **Tim Schaaf - 00:19**

And let's get started right into the interesting topic of the Swedish Football League.

Just starting with like real basic, what do you consider like key challenges but also strengths of the Swedish Football League compared also to other smaller leagues, maybe the Nordics, maybe something else and what are like the key characteristics, what is unique to the Swedish Football?

### **Martin Carlsson-Wall - 00:45**

So I think a fair comparison is to say that the Swedish football league is the little brother or little sister of Bundesliga. So if you have on the one hand a premier league who is fully commercialized and then you have Bundesliga who is 50+1 Denmark is fully commercialized while Sweden has 50+1.

So in that sense I think those four leagues is sort of quite relevant as a starting point because in

the same way that you can compare The Premier League with Bundesliga and they have many similarities there are also key differences around, you know, you could say who owns the clubs.

Is it sort of financial owners or is it the members?

So similar to Bundesliga, all football clubs in Sweden are owned by the members.

There are some clubs that have sold out parts but less than 50%, so 49%.

But in reality, those... they're not really investors. They're more, almost you could say, donors, like giving to charity. The key thing with the Swedish Football League, very similar to Bundesliga, is that because the supporters feel that they are in charge, the atmosphere in the stand is fantastic.

So if you compare with Denmark, Obviously in Denmark you have Copenhagen and Brønby, so you have some clubs that can have, especially if it's a derby, they can have a lot of people, but in general they don't in Denmark, so I think spectator-wise and the atmosphere in the arena, that's the biggest strength of Swedish football.

If you look at a little bit, let's call it down, what's the negatives?

Similar to Bundesliga, it's because you don't have enough money.

So obviously right now, what you're seeing, and I have one course, it's called Investments and Value Creation in Global Sports, which is an elective in the master program and this past Monday, we had a guest lecture with La Liga.

And obviously La Liga, they have diversified their portfolio, both in terms of geographical markets, how they expand, but also in terms of the number of products and services that they offer to their supporters and fans.

And this requires a lot of new capital because you cannot afford to actually take that type of risk if you don't have a lot of equity. So La Liga has taken in the private equity company CVC and maybe Read about that and all of that. But similar to Bundesliga who has decided not to take in

money - Same in Sweden.

The challenge is that if you take for example talent development.

So both Swedish football and Danish football they sell a lot of players.

But since the Danish clubs are commercial they can buy players from Sweden for let's say 2 million euro and then sell to Borussia Dortmund or Bayern Munich for a higher sort of premium.

While the Swedish clubs, since they don't have the balance sheet to buy a player from maybe 2 or 3 million euro, they need to develop them themselves.

And as a consequence of that, the total revenue generated by the league on, you could say, player transfer is much higher in Denmark than it is in Sweden.

And I think long term this is going to have quite a significant effect that might be negative for the Swedish league.

**Tim Schaaf - 04:26**

Looking just back to the beginning, how would you say, before coming back to the youth talent and stuff like that, what would you say how has the Swedish Football League evolved over the past years? Was it always like that or was that like really a strategic decision which was made in the past decade or so?

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 04:47**

No, this has been the same since you could say for almost 100 years.

And actually, there has been discussions where maybe 20 years ago, maybe 25 years ago, there were discussions around taking away the 50+1 rule for Swedish football.

But since Swedish football is part of the umbrella organization, the Swedish Confederation of Sports, they have not allowed any sort of exceptions.

## Literature & Appendix

So the politicians in Sweden, they know that if you give money to the Swedish confederation of sports, it's going to be given to organizations which are known for profit.

And this secures the legitimacy of the sports system in Sweden.

And as a consequence of that, it's very difficult to change and take away the 50+1 rule.

Like I said maybe 20 years ago there was a big debate around this and you could say almost political struggle.

But at a certain point of time actually the rest of Swedish sports joined together with some supporter fractions and the supporters internally you know made the specific football clubs go out and say well we wanted to vote in the Swedish Football Association to ensure that the 50 plus one rule remains and as a consequence of that, there might be some investors and CEOs saying, look at Denmark or look at Premier League or look at others. Now we have the trend sports as an asset class and so on.

But in reality, this is a non-issue in Sweden and it has been the same and given the last 5-10 years, huge success in the stands. Much bigger success, you could say, in terms of arena atmosphere than football performance. This has created a situation where everyone involved in Swedish football wants to maintain the current system.

### **Tim Schaaf - 06:58**

Okay, so you just mentioned it.

It has not really translated to sportive success so far, even though Malmö was quite successful in recent years.

But in Sweden alone, the Swedish league is quite popular, right?

Most of the fans really appreciate the way the Swedish league is going.

Would you say this is a concept?

Association is listening to their fans, including them in major decisions, which is also transferable to other small leagues or countries?

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 07:36**

I think maybe to some extent it's transferable and to other extent it might not be transferable.

So, if one wants to understand the Swedish football league, It's almost impossible to understand the intricacies without understanding its link to the broader Swedish sports system. So it's extremely important when you analyze Swedish football that you understand that all of Swedish sports, what's called the Swedish sport family, wants to join together and keep it as one family.

And this has to do with the legitimacy of getting public funding, both from the government, sort of nationally, but also locally from municipalities. So, just so you understand, in Sweden, out of 10 million, about one third is a member of a sports club.

But there is no other country I know of where you could say that one third of the population is a member of a sports club.

So you could say, sport is a very, very strong DNA of the Swedish identity and culture.

As a consequence of that, you can say it has achieved a special role in society.

One has to remember the historical background. Sweden, for many years, was run by the Social Democratic Party. If you take a 100-year perspective, the Social Democratic Party has been the ruling party for maybe 85 years. That is extreme globally.

If you take away China and other sort of non-democratic countries.

But having one party that's so strong then renders the question, how can it be like that?

And research has shown that the close link between the Social Democratic Party and the Swedish Football Association is a very interesting link - So the Swedish Football Association has one million members. Out of the Swedish population, 10% all citizens are a member of a Swedish

football club.

So as a consequence, what you could call grassroots sports or, you know, that type of more bottom-up type of sports is extremely important to understand why people love the current system and why they don't want to change it - and in other countries where you might say you don't really have the broad consensus or the broad anchoring in society, then it's easier to, you know, go fully commercial because you don't really lose out on a lot of public money. But in Sweden, you know, the close relationship with the Swedish Social Democratic Party and Swedish football and Swedish sports in general has sort of made Sweden to what it is. And for many, many years, the prime minister of Sweden, it would always be a male. The chairman of the Football Association would always be male and he would also vote Social Democrat.

So it would be a very sort of a, you know, reciprocal relation that the Social Democratic Party would say, we will ensure that the Swedish sports movement will get its money and that all municipalities and cities will build nice arenas and, you know, in return, we would expect that and you know, you tell your members to vote Social Democratic.

Now things are changing, but I think one has to understand this sort of very historical roots of where we come and as a consequence of that, I actually don't expect that things will change a lot. They will obviously now when the global sports system is developing and changing quite a lot with Saudi and sort of you know, private equity companies from the US and so on, they will have implications, but very similar to the German Bundesliga, it will take a long time, okay.

### **Tim Schaaf - 11:37**

Do you think this, like the money perspective being limited on sponsorship, maybe also TV money, because like fans also have a right to say something in scheduling, as far as I know - do you think this is like the main limitation factor when it comes to the Swedish League? Is that like

the sole limiter of why Sweden is not able to grow into like top 5 is maybe unrealistic, but top 10 league in Europe?

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 12:10**

I had that discussion actually with the CEO of Malmo Niklas Carlén because they are looking at the Czech Republic. So the Czech Republic has around 10 million citizens.

And in terms of GDP, it's a much poorer country, less developed country than Sweden.

But the Czech Republic is ranked as number nine in the UEFA ranking.

So Sweden is now actually looking at, you know, other, you know, and that's why it would be interesting to see the result of your study, because it's very easy to, yeah, you know, it's easy to compare and benchmark with Bundesliga, Premier League and, you know, Serie A or League 1 or maybe La Liga also of course.

But these sort of smaller leagues like the Danish league, Belgium, obviously of course Portugal, the Czech Republic, maybe Switzerland.

That type of league category is really interesting to benchmark and see what's going on.

I would just say that right now many of the Swedish football clubs have not been playing in Europe enough.

They're not like Niklas Carlén, I mean he's on the board of the European Club Association, so he knows quite a bit about the European competitors or you could say partners. In general the Swedish Football League has been quite focused on Swedish challenges and not really going beyond Sweden.

**Tim Schaaf - 13:47**

Okay yeah of course I mean we can forward that to you and that is exactly what we are trying to

look into. Do you know what actions are currently being taken to get to improve those sportive or maybe also financial spheres because like, as you said, like, Bundesliga has like similar challenges, but with a higher starting point also relating to population. But is there anything which is being done at the moment?

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 14:18**

There's quite a lot that we are actually involved in many of the initiatives.

One initiative is education. So the culture of the sort of known for profit being close to the supporters, that's also a culture issue.

And for the Swedish Football League, for the past 10 years, they have been going to executive education programs from the Stockholm School of Economics.

Historically, they would have gone to a sort of a sport college like in Germany, there would be a Deutsche Sporthochschule in Köln.

But now they go to WHU, so to speak - now they go to Sascha (comment for clarification: Schmidt, sports management professor at WHU)

And so the trend where you go from a specialized sports university into a more broader business school, that is a trend that you can see both in Germany - Sascha and WHU does a lot in Bundesliga and it's the same in Sweden.

So knowledge-wise they're taking steps. You also see steps in terms of hiring processes.

So, you know, we started 10 years ago with the Centre for Sports and Business and at that point you had a lot of people that, you know, had no university education, they had no background or experience from working in other sort of jobs.

They would be sort of a long-term person that, you know, maybe started with just bookkeeping and then, you know, evolving into the sort of CFO - a little bit similar to family firms. But now

things have been professionalized a lot.

So even though you could say the ownership governance structure has not changed, you now have a much broader view on current affairs.

And I would also say curiosity in terms of looking at how the league can do digitalization, how they can do sustainability. Obviously now, as with many leagues, there's league level initiatives around how to develop players and sell players so the transfer net would go up and in that sense also start trying to systematically try to advance in the European leagues. Another thing which I think is interesting if you would compare that to let's say Portugal or if you would compare to Scotland maybe even Czech Republic is that in Sweden historically It's been very difficult to win the league two years in a row - So this year Malmö FF won for the second year in a row and this was the first time since I think 1986 that someone had done that. So there is very clearly so that you have a number of clubs that compete, So it's not like out of the 16 clubs in the top division, the equivalent to Bundesliga, that only 16 can win. That's not how it happens.

But maybe six or seven clubs historically have been able to win a championship.

And because of the uncertainty of I think that is one of the drivers why many of the clubs have so many supporters.

Because the league is not sort of decided early on in the season.

That has been a huge success factor for the Swedish league.

I mean In Bundesliga last year it was Bayer Leverkusen but before that it was by Bayern Munich.

It was 10-15 years in a row.

If you look at Scotland you have Celtic and Rangers in many many leagues you have a few very dominant clubs. But Sweden has not been like that and I think that is one of the success factors.

**Tim Schaaf - 17:57**

Wouldn't that also make very interesting to people outside of Sweden?

Of course, You also have to have the kind sportive quality which is increasing obviously.

But I think also in Premier League, Manchester City won like six out of the nine last titles and in La Liga it's basically only two or three teams. In Serie A of course there is some change after Juventus had that financial problems but would you say that makes also the Swedish league maybe There is potential as a really competitive, balanced league to grow into popular fan favourite?

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 18:39**

I think that's a relevant question.

I think it has two answers.

On the one hand, the answer is yes, because the competitive balance makes it interesting and the league is not decided early on; On the other hand, since the best league because of this does not advance very much in the European leagues, you don't really have, let's say, a star club. Now Malmo might emerge to be like that So you see Malmo being the Juventus of Sweden. We'll see about that.

But I think that has been a little bit of the trade-off.

It then becomes very interesting for Swedish supporters to follow the league and Swedish supporters would say, if you look at TV ratings and everything, the Swedish league has much higher TV ratings than the Premier League and everyone would know that the Premier League obviously has quality-wise much better football.

But since you root for your local team and since the league is so even and during a season things

can change if you have a little bit of a dip, that has been a strength.

But also realize it's a little bit of downside because if you don't advance long in Europe you can never be a team that attracts foreign fans. Because you don't really have that star quality. But I would say after having been to you know games in Sweden and also abroad, if you go to one of the Stockholm Derbys, there are three teams in Stockholm – if you go to one of them, that's most likely better than in London – it's probably like Borussia Dortmund against Schalke, You know, that type of, you know, maybe Hamburg Sportverein versus St. Pauli or, you know, I mean maybe Bayern Munich versus Dortmund, but it's extremely high rivalry.

And the sort of arena atmosphere when we have guests in Sweden, they're like, wow, you know, it's like the entire arena is full they have all the fireworks and, you know, borderline is this too much and the police is a little bit, you know, anxious and so on.

So the stadium atmosphere is fantastic in Sweden.

Absolute top European class.

### **Tim Schaaf - 21:09**

Okay.

Maybe coming back to like the youth and talent attraction pipeline you were talking about earlier, would you say there's like an argument that Swedish is better in developing youth talents than other countries.

What makes Sweden maybe attractive for young talents and is that a valid strategy even going forward because like we feel or like we try to identify that like that's the main strategy of most small countries because like they say okay we don't have money so we need to develop our own talent.

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 21:51**

Here you could say, so I fully agree that in general, and I think this is a little bit problematic because normally what happens is that football clubs, they don't have knowledge about commercialization. And then when you can commercialize the sporting side, then they focus all their efforts on that specific.

And that's like a car manufacturer that just becomes too dependent on one product in their product portfolio.

**Tim Schaaf - 22:21**

Exactly – we have that in Germany.

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 22:23**

Yeah exactly. So I think the Swedish sports system from the grassroots is extremely strong - so if you have 10% of the entire population, you know, being involved formally in football clubs, not playing on the side, but being in a club, that means the system produces a lot of potential stars. Historically, that has been enough.

Now, when you have, you know, a clear tension between, you could say, grassroots, you know, everyone should be involved and sort of elite academies that might actually start at eight, nine years old. This tension is very, you know, apparent in Sweden right now around the debate.

So, for example, you have one Stockholm club, Brommapojkarna, I don't know, BP, they're called, I don't know if you've noticed them, but BP is actually the largest football club in Europe - They have over 5,000 youths. In certain age groups, they have like 25 teams. So in terms of youth development, in the Swedish national team, Brommapojkarna is actually called the talent factory of Sweden. So, you know, they would have after the squad of maybe 25 players, six or seven

people would come from Brommapojkarna. They play now at the highest division, but, you know, they don't have any fans or anything, but they just, you know, are very good at talent development.

But this idea that, you know, how do you balance the sort football for all grassroots mentality with elite-ish type of academies to make money; That is a big debate right and something that, we'll see where it ends up. But a lot of football clubs are struggling with this issue. Because historically it has been enough that you just have large volumes of players and then you just have patience and some will just come out and really good stars like Zlatan Ibrahimovic and others. But now when the competition to develop players, I mean normally now to have a good price you normally need to be quite well developed to play in a senior male team when you are 16 or 17. And then you need to start technically to train that individual when he or she, but normally he, because you make more money there, is six, seven years old and onwards.

So, big challenge and I think also compared to Denmark, the Swedish league strategy sort of elite strategy has been that you have a broad base in youth and then you take your own youth players and develop them and then you sell them.

I think Denmark has, because of their different governance, the commercialized governments, they can buy players that are 15-16 for let's say 1 million euro and then sell them for 5. And, historically, it's only Malmo now that has been able to afford that.

Maybe one of the Stockholm clubs, or AIK or Hammersby or Djurgården can do that but the rest cannot. So it's going to be a challenge, think, for the coming years.

### **Tim Schaaf - 25:35**

So I think transfer surplus is like the one main source of income, the other is for sure like the commercial sponsorship side.

Would you say there's already done enough to fund money from sponsors or is there any kind of innovative strategy which could still be used? Are Swedish clubs doing enough to earn money on that way or is there still some expertise out there which is not used.

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 26:11**

There are two answers to that question.

The first thing is expertise.

And we train the commercial directors of all Swedish football clubs.

And I can honestly say that it has improved quite a bit, but there is still a way to go, so that's number one, lack of knowledge. But it's getting better.

It's getting better. But the biggest problem is actually branding.

And this is a little bit of a strategic delicacy also. Because in terms of selling tickets, you want the Hooligan fans almost, or at least ultra fans.

And you know, to get the atmosphere in the arena. But many of the large Swedish stock listed companies like H&M or Volvo or Ericsson, they don't want to sponsor a team. So if you take the chairman of H&M, for example, he's a big, big fan of Djurgården, one of the teams here - The Chelsea of Stockholm, you could say.

A little bit more posher club. But he would never put H&M logo on your Djurgården's jersey because of the potential that supporters from other clubs would then bash the brand or H&M brand would end up in situations with hooligan fans and negative publicity. So when you have the hooligans or the ultra supporters running the show basically, you have a lot of advantages in terms of resilience and also arena atmosphere, but you also have huge problems in terms of security and because of that the problems of signing really big brands that can pay a lot of money in terms of commercial deals.

So I'm not sure You know, maybe Swedish clubs could, by going to business schools and acquiring more knowledge, develop a little bit; But this structural idea, this risk for brand dilution, for stock listed brands, you cannot take away that even if you would take a fantastic person from a commercial company and he or she would be the commercial director for Malmo FF, or Djurgården or Hammarby or AIK

**Tim Schaaf - 28:21**

Okay okay. Touching upon one of the first things you said in that answer like the storytelling and branding approach. I think Sweden and Swedish football has already done a lot in that category because like I think a decade ago they had more problems with hooligans and fights and It has disappeared or has not really disappeared but has decreased already and also I think now the story is more about telling about the great atmosphere and not about the harmful sides. Is there already done enough or are there maybe also more marketing / storytelling approach as the Swedish league could take, so also get to brands like you mentioned without them having the fear.

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 28:55**

So in our master elective investments in value creation and global sport we work with Angel And Julie Ehrmann, who is the CEO of Angel City, when you hear her talk, the storytelling they do is fantastic.

It's so much better than the Swedish storytelling.

So I think you can do much more. That being said, you could say the trajectory is still positive.

So Swedish clubs are learning, but I would they're learning towards already, you could say, you're preaching to the choir basically.

So Swedish fans have been very good, let's say that you have a person in a household that has a

ticket season to also attract other people in the same household or a neighbour or other Swedes.

That's why the spectators, now you see a lot of you could say normal fans also going to games that, you know, 20 years ago, you would not see them.

So they have been very successful there. But the Swedish league has not been very successful in capitalizing on the fantastic arena atmosphere.

So, for example, when it comes to tourists, you could imagine that you go to Stockholm and then the city of Stockholm, their destination board, they market Stockholm in a certain way that, you know, it's nice with the weather and in the summer it's fantastic, blah, blah. But it's a little bit surprising that there is no explicit marketing around the different sports, given the you know huge potential that sports plays in Sweden and I would say the European fantastic atmosphere. You could see it maybe a little bit now with the conference league. It's actually, from an arena perspective better when they play in the conference league than in the Europa League.

Because in the Europa League it's only Malmö that wins, otherwise they lose quite a bit; But in the conference league, you know Djurgården and others, they can play, for example a Croatian team, an exotic team, and then it becomes a lot of fun, for both sides. The Croatians are coming here, the Swedish are going to Croatia or Portugal and so on.

### **Tim Schaaf - 31:28**

I think touched upon it in the beginning. Sweden has the only top 30 league in Europe which has not implemented VAR so far. And it's also rejecting to do so I think.

I think there no plans to do think the arguments for that are fair. I mean, every fan can understand the frustration. Would you say there are other technologies or innovations maybe out there which could implemented in the Swedish leagues?

Or would you say the fan culture and the whole sport culture which you described is so much against the technological growth that it's not feasible at all?

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 32:16**

I think this one has to the VAR is very, lot of people that are you know very, almost hooligan ultra fans; They are extremely sceptical. They're extremely I am actually not sure that the average fan is so sceptical. It's just that the narrative has become Sweden is against the VAR. So for example, those who are explicitly publicly, first the current chairman of the Swedish Football Association, his name is Fredrik Reinfeldt.

He used to be our prime minister. He went out and tried to say, yeah, maybe over time we need to, you know, think about technology.

And he was bashed and there were so many you know, in the stands, where you can see where banners, exactly, you know, fire Fredrik Reinfeldt, get rid of Reinfeldt, etc, etc.

The only person that, you know, has gotten away or where you can say, you know, has voiced - It's the head of the referee association.

So he has gone out and said, you know, if we don't have these technologies, it's actually going to reduce our ability to compete internationally because all our colleagues globally, they train with VAR every week, while we can only do that when we referee European games. And right now, I don't think that supporters think it's good enough argument, I don't I would not expect any other technology to emerge.

So maybe over time when it becomes just this is the way things are that even Sweden would do it, but right now there is no movement towards that all.

Actually Swedish fans, this has actually become, since Swedish fans know VAR, they don't know a lot of finance. So if you have the trend of sports as a new asset class, a lot of the supporters

don't feel that they have a professional opinion about that but with VAR they feel they can, so this has symbolically also a way for the fans to say that they decide and look here, that's how we want it.

**Tim Schaaf - 34:28**

Maybe another thing, which is quite different from Nordic leagues to the rest of Europe leagues is the calendar of play. It's also of course a weather thing. But of course, it also presents significant disadvantages when competing European-wide. Do you think there's any way to... First of all, for the fans it makes a huge summer ... a winter break.

So there's four or even five months without football at all where fans are not engaged, you don't earn money as a club and second of all the sportive quality which will suffer from that. Do you think there's any possibility to change that?

Is there any thoughts about it or is it just not implementable at all and there cannot be played football at all.

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 35:31**

So here, from an external perspective, one might look at the Geography and say, you know, okay, we understand it's winter, it's cold, should you do it or not?

And then on the flip side, you would say, well, it costs you a lot of money because the transfer windows and when you buy and sell and when you, know, qualify for different tournaments, etc, it's much better to have the same rhythm and season as everyone else. Then one needs to, and this is the then one needs to understand how the Swedish sports system is working. Because in contrast to Denmark or Norway, ice hockey is very big. So historically, ice hockey has had the winter, and football has had the summer That's why, you know, Denmark, they don't really do ice

hockey. I mean, they do ice hockey, but it's not a big sport. So for them, it's no big clash with sponsors.

And it's the same in In Norway. In Sweden it would be a huge crash. You know, a huge crash. So in many cities, you would have a top team, an ice hockey team and also a top football team. And they are very complimentary. So many of the fans would go and watch both football and so watch ice hockey in the winter and football in summer.

So this idea that you're left without football for, you know, four or five that's not for the general Swede a valid argument, because they would say, no, I'm actually I was tired of football and now the hockey season has started and now I'm watching ice hockey instead. So I would not see any change at all. I cannot see even. Because it would cannibalize a lot on ice hockey potentially, but would also make the sponsors unhappy, they like the idea in the summer you sponsor a football team and in the winter you sponsor an ice hockey team.

**Tim Schaaf - 37:33**

Fair enough. Do you think, looking beyond Sweden there is a small football league where the Swedish football league could look up to and apply some of their best practices to have like sustainable growth in the upcoming years financially or sportive perspective?

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 37:51**

The short answer is yes and I think when you look at the leagues like maybe Portugal, maybe Belgium, maybe Czech Republic, even Denmark and others. You can look at them. I mean, one has to be mindful about what is it that these leagues have. They basically owners that can pump in money. They don't make any money, they pump it in.

As a consequence, they can have a little bit of a different strategy when it comes to talent

development and talent acquisition. I think maybe some Swedish clubs can look at that and, you know, maybe professionalize by buying your own stadium and so on. But in general, it is challenging. So I see potential for learning best practices, definitely from single clubs and others - but on the structural level, I think it's a little bit I mean, it's like comparing Bundesliga with Premier League. In Premier League, many of the teams have American owners or at least foreign owners. They think a lot about all the assets that's around the arena, given it's real estate. They try to diversify.

In Bundesliga, obviously, when the members own the club, they don't have the capital for that, nor are they interested in that type of diversification.

So because of that, On a broad scale the benchmark but on specific functions like ticketing or talent development or sponsorship sales definitely you can learn - but on a broad scale a little bit thank you very much.

**Tim Schaaf - 39:38**

Thank you very much! Maybe just as a final yes or no answer do you think it's feasible for the Swedish league to develop in the next decade, let's say, into top 10 or borderline top 10, maybe top 12 league?

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 40:06**

No. It depends on how you, I don't foresee, I mean, I would be positively surprised, but given that becoming a top 10 league is a lot about the sporting performance in European tournaments, I don't foresee that Swedish clubs have the balance sheet and the ability to have an income statement that, you know, affords the type of squads that you need to perform in Europe. And as a consequence of that, I don't think they will be a Top 10. Do I think that the Swedish Football

League will have certain issues like digitalization, sustainability, arena atmosphere, where we are definitely top five? Yes, very much so. If the ranking would change and you would look at, you know, not only sporting performance for how you rank, but know, have it a little bit broader like you do with, you know, when you rank business schools then I think the Swedish Football League would be definitely top 10. It's very sort of well round. They're interested in knowledge, their local embeddedness in terms of football clubs is fantastic. Nowadays, many of the clubs' financials are actually much, much better, so they don't take on financial risks. So if you think of it a little bit more historically, of how you think about performance, then the Swedish league is, you could say definitely a league to look at. And because of that, when we do a lot of benchmarks with smaller leagues, they actually are not better at all. It's just that the smaller leagues like the Scottish league or the Czech league, they have a few owners who are very sort of pumping money.

And of course their teams are going to be better because they pay much higher salaries and can afford training arena and a match arena that makes them become a bigger club. But if you look at it and compare apples with apples and not apples with pears, the Swedish league is actually fantastic.

**Tim Schaaf - 41:58**

Actually, we're trying to develop our own model for measuring league success and balancing like sportive, financial and also social performance, which then includes community engagement, bringing fans to the sport, sustainability.

So we'll see what we come up with and it's going to be a very interesting.

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 42:22**

Yeah, I think that's also why you won't actually see so much because when Swedish supporters and also sport executives or academics like me go out and compare, you actually see that in many dimensions Swedish football is actually at the forefront!

**Tim Schaaf - 42:49**

Very nice. Thank you very much for your time.

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 43:03**

When will the report due?

Is it the end of the semester?

**Tim Schaaf - 43:16**

Yeah, it is like in a few weeks' time around that. So, we already finished literature review and stuff like that and are currently trying to really go deeper into the Research Question. But yeah, we're happy to share our results at the end.

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 43:19**

That sounds fantastic.

Looking forward to that.

Best of luck. If you have more complimentary questions, just let me know, okay?

**Justus Pranger - 43:23**

Thank you very much.

**Martin Carlsson-Wall - 43:29**

Thank you, bye bye.