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FOREWORD

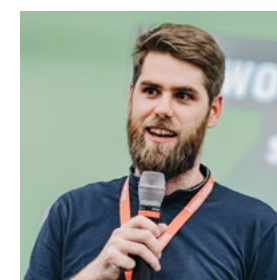
These are turbulent times. Two years of pandemic are now followed by war in Europe. Unthinkable, but reality. The consequences are rising costs, especially for energy, and inflation numbers like almost 50 years ago.

The rising costs are causing decision-makers in football to worry. On the one hand, for example, operating stadiums costs significantly more, on the other hand, fans have less and less money left in their pockets. Money that football clubs live on in the form of matchday and merchandising revenues - especially those that cannot rely on lucrative TV rights deals.

These are challenging times for all. Football clubs have to find a way to cope with their own financial situation and rising costs while not asking too much from the fan. At the moment, this seems to be working. To the outside world, football seems relatively unimpressed by social problems.

On the contrary, socio-politically important topics such as sustainability, diversity and leadership are increasingly taking place in football, and women's football is getting a bigger and bigger stage. Football is becoming a platform for change and development. This is a role that suits football well if it is taken seriously and pursued sustainably.

It is to be hoped that these positive developments in football will not be devoured by the energy crisis, cost explosion and the like.



Thomas Maurer

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THE GROWTH OF FOOTBALL IN CANADA

Rob Friend used to play football in Europe, in the German Bundesliga for example, and in the Canadian national team. 2014, he retired, but is still the heart of professional football and the development of professional football in Canada - as co-owner and CEO of Pacific FC, playing in the Canadian Premier League.

By Thomas Maurer

How did you get from being a player to a co-owner and CEO of Pacific FC? How did that happen?

When I finished my (football) career, I already had a sort of business background. While I was playing, I always had other business sides or investment opportunities, mainly real estate. I was also educated

at the university of business, so the business side of football was always interesting to me. When I retired in 2014, there was a discussion about the Canadian Premier League concept, and there were whispers about the World Cup coming to Canada in 2026. So obviously, a big opportunity for Canada to finally invest in football - with

our own domestic league, something that was never available for players like myself before.

But of course, if there's a business, it has to make sense, right? Because no one's going to invest in the "start-up" League and lose a lot of money.

So the business case had to be interesting. Victor Montagliani (who is now the FIFA vice president) was the Canadian soccer president at that time, and he came up with a very interesting concept similar to the MLS's. It means we bundled the league and then the national team into one business that owns, sells and controls the commercial interests and assets. So that's one business that the owners in the Canadian Premier League would own. We would essentially purchase that off from the Canada Soccer and create this entity called Canada Soccer Business. Then that's when you go sell the broadcast, major partnerships, and the sponsorship for the national team(both men's and women's) and the league.

That was when I got very interested in this as a business opportunity and, of course, myself as a player. I live in Canada, have kids, and am an ambassador of the game in this country. So I said, OK, I have to be involved in this because it's going to grow the sport.

It's going to provide opportunities for young Canadians that never have this opportunity; to support our national team. We also need to be relevant and make the World Cup, and so without our own domestic league, it will be challenging.

That's kind of how it all started. I then brought in my other two partners, Josh Simpson (a former player) and Dean Shillington. They were very interested, and we came together. We said now we need a market, a city, a stadium. So we looked around and called the cities and their mayors.

A lot of cities said: "Well, we don't know what the Canadian Premier League is, so we're not going to invest". Fortunately, we eventually found a city - Langford in Greater Victoria, on Vancouver Island and just a bit outside of Vancouver. It's a beautiful city and region with about 400,000 people. So it was a nice size that we needed to create a fanbase and sponsorship base. The mayor agreed to build us a 6,000-seat stadium if we brought the club. We're now expanding to 10,000 seats because it has been so successful. We've been champions and having tons



Rob Friend Co-Owner & CEO, Pacific FC

of interests. We also bring national-team games there, and it's been a huge success. We have to thank the mayor for investing in the infrastructure because, without this stadium, we couldn't play and have a franchise.

So when this journey began, I put both my business and football hat on together and used a lot of football intuition because I was playing at traditional clubs and understood the game as a player. Together with my business acumen, I know how to start a football or what a football club should be in Canada, which is what we created at Pacific FC. If you look at the club right now, we're champions and have already sold players into bigger leagues - a solid business model in football. We have a strong fanbase of 4,000-5,000 fans for a small market like Canada, where you started from nothing. So it's a very challenging but also fascinating journey.

As one of the founding clubs or founding members, are you somehow involved in the Canadian Premier League as well?

So how the Premier League is structured is the founding members, the founding clubs, which were seven of us, and now we

brought in Atletico Ottawa as a founding member. We all own the league together and have our percentage of the Canadian Premier League.

We're all on the board of the Canadian Premier League and the Canadian Soccer Business, which controls the commercial interest in Canadian soccer. So we're heavily involved on the board, make big decisions in the league, and make big decisions at the national team level.

So it would be like the Austrian Bundesliga owning the Austrian Football Federation as one business together. The founding members own it and control it together. And, of course, the national team's success creates more interest and value in commercial and broadcast, which allows us to reinvest in the infrastructure and grow our league.

So were you more or less involved in creating the league at the very start?

Yes, exactly. We all founded the league together. We made an initial investment in purchasing the Canadian Soccer Business and acquired the rights of Canadian soccer for 20 years. We created and built this league from scratch and sat here three and a half years later when we started to see where this league is now. It was a start-up



Pacific FC is one of currently eight clubs in the Canadian Premier League and the reigning champion of the CPL.

league, and after one year we had so much momentum but had to shut down for almost two years due to the pandemic. But we went through it, and it made us and the fans even stronger. It's important that the fans and the community see that this league is here to stay and don't just come and go like many leagues in North America. It's not easy to have a sustainable league, but I think we do have one. We have the business model that sets us up for success.

“Imagine if you have to tell the people here’s a new football club in Vancouver and ask them to buy tickets or merchandise, but they have never been to a game and don’t know any players or coaches.”

Rob Friend

You mentioned that you played at the traditional German and European clubs. What did you take from those clubs, and is there something you would like to do differently?

I think it's a bit of a hybrid. There are a lot of traditions when you look at clubs like Hertha Berlin, Mönchengladbach, or Eintracht Frankfurt. But I think the challenge with tradition is it's hard to leave them, right?

So I think what we can learn from those clubs how vital the fan base is and what the club means to the community. And that's a fabric of football, right? What it means to the community, how it inspires the community, and how it's a major part of your community. And when you're from that city, representing that club is very important to you and your family. Hence, we have to educate the Canadians because people

never had football and what a football club means to a community. We want to say that this city and this football club represent our community and the fans want to wear the shirt and go to games because it represents them. When building this club out, we must understand the community and its culture because every country or city is different culturally.

So when placing the “tradition” element in Canada, which has a different sports culture, we have to educate people, especially young kids, what football means from the top down together with entertainment. Interestingly, in North America, sports and entertainment come together, unlike in Europe, where sports first and then entertainment. It means that we must have good food, good beer, and fun activities around the stadium. So we must have areas built in the stadium for families who want to bring their kids, the likes of face painting, bouncy castles, and so on. Meanwhile, in Europe, we go to the game, you watch football with a hot dog, a Bratwurst, and that's it. So that's one of the different elements we need to create our model.

With my background playing in Europe, I think we still need to build the community as the core, which will take some time to educate the people and the city. We need to tell them: “Hey, this is professional football, a global game. This football club represents your region, and you should be proud to support it. It's more than just 90 minutes on the pitch”. So it's a challenge, but I can see more people turn to us now and it's taken 4 years to get here, but it's part of the journey.

What were the biggest challenges when you first started with the Pacific FC?

I think it was defining the club and defining what it means. As I said, Canada is new to football, and football is new to the community. Most Canadians are hockey fans or other sports fans. Still, football (soccer) is a popular sport and has very high participation at the youth levels. There are also many immigrants who are also football fans, so it's going to grow and articulate what football clubs can mean to the community. So the first task is to get the community's sup-

port and figure out the right formula. Then the next challenge is to create the entertainment value for those families who pay for the tickets - how to offer them drinks, food, and entertainment at the stadium. It started with this concept of a club before we even kicked a ball, which is bizarre to think about. Imagine if you have to tell the people here's a new football club in Vancouver and ask them to buy tickets or merchandise, but they have never been to a game and don't know any players or coaches. However, once they are at the stadium, you have the opportunity to capture their interests and turn them into lifelong fans. So we always ask ourselves, how are we going to do that? How do we create the stadium experience or the connection with players? How can we invest in the community so they can feel that? So it's the whole journey into the stadium and then keep them there and keep them as lifelong fans. And it was a big challenge when we first started.

So what are the challenges right now? How did you cope with COVID and any challenges post-Covid era?

Our biggest challenge in the country right now is making the Canadian Premier League more relevant and popular. If you go to mid-sized countries like Denmark, Norway, Austria, and Croatia, they all have their own leagues, right? I mean, you don't have to be a football fan to recognize your country's national league. We're still not there as a country, so if you travel to Toronto tomorrow, get in a taxi and ask: “Do you know the Canadian Premier League?”. The answer is probably no. We're still not there in terms of everybody knowing it. We're still new but getting out more and becoming more relevant as a professional league. Everybody knows the MLS now, the likes of Toronto FC, Vancouver Whitecaps, or CF Montréal, but not the Canadian Premier League. So that's the biggest challenge right now.

How big is the Pacific FC regarding how many people are working there, especially on the business side? How does your business situation look like at the moment?

Our targets are 4 to 5 million in revenue a year. Our average fan attendance is 3,000

on a low game. On a big game with a packed stadium, it would be 6,000. We have 15 business staff and 16 technical staff, and the players. So it's a good size operation. We're not at the MLS's level yet, whose budget is 25 - 50 million, but we could be strategic to claim the Canadian championship and compete with the other three Canadian MLS teams. Last year, we beat Vancouver Whitecaps with a budget of \$25 million and lost to Toronto, whose budget is \$40-50 million. We're now going into CONCACAF because we won the league. So I think you could compete with much smaller budgets, but you have to be very strategic and clever about how to compete on and off the field.

In short, I would say we're a mid-level club that gets 3,000 - 5,000 fans a game, and though we have a salary cap, we still have to invest in that to be more competitive. We also want to be sustainable, and that's why the salary cap is so important because you can't have one or two owners trying to spend, and then everyone else tries to compete. Eventually, it will not be sustainable. We invest a lot in our business because it's more than just football. We have strong marketing people and want to invest in the community. So we're different from Europe, where sporting success is still heavy, and people tend to spend all the money on the performance.

What is the vision of the Canadian Premier League? And what potential do you see in Canada for a football league?

Our goal is to be a top-three league in CONCACAF. Of course, the MLS and the Mexican leagues are world-class leagues now with big investments there. So if we can be the third-best, I think we've done a tremendous job. Our target is to become the third-strongest professional league in CONCACAF in 5 years. So how do we invest in the youth in Canada? We have a lot of good players here, and how can we get them into the Canadian Premier League. Then how can they move on from there? I see nothing wrong with being a league that sells players, which is our goal. For example, the MLS - our neighbor league, is starting to spend a lot of money on player transfers. So how do we get them to invest in us? What is our international strategy? We have seen





In 2021 Pacific FC became champion of the CPL, defeating the reigning back-to-back champion Forge FC.

seven foreign players that were allowed to play per team. It's important that we target very young international talents, not some 29-year-old but maybe a 19-year-old who does not have an opportunity in Venezuela or Colombia but wants to come to Canada. Hence, we must leverage Canada as a safe country where people want to live, and footballers play here.

It's a combination of investing in Canadian football and the young players by identifying them and creating platforms for them to develop to be successful once they come into the Canadian Premier League. I'm telling you we have a lot of talents, and then, of course, the success of the national team directly impacts us because Canadian people will be more interested in the game, like: "Oh, I love Canada soccer. I'm a big Alfonso Davies fan. Maybe I'll go to my local team, my local game. Because now I'm interested in Canadian football. And that's going to grow the interest in the game here in Canada". So that will have a direct success to our league.

You know we have a five-year plan to be top three in this region, which I think

we're pretty close when you look at how our teams are already competing in CONCACAF.

How would the World Cup impact the league?

Since we directly own the Canadian Soccer Business, we have a tangible effect. Plus, as our national team is now in the 2022's World Cup, more sponsors want to partner up with the national team, which is ours. So that sponsorship will go into us, and then we get to reinvest it into the Canadian Premier League and Canadian football. We have another World Cup in four and a half years in Canada, which will be even more investments and interest. That will again go back into our league to develop infrastructure and become stronger and more sustainable.

Which are the key revenue streams of the league? Is it the typical one, such as broadcasting/TV rights?

We have a fantastic deal with Media Pro, which owns broadcasting rights of La Liga in Spain. They bought our rights for ten years plus another ten years, and so we have a strong deal and stable revenue from

them, and they do a fantastic job. We have a streaming service called One Soccer that you can go on and watch all the games. You can watch the Canadian Premier League and the Canadian National team when there are games, and they have some other leagues on that as well. It's crucial to have some other leagues on the platform to grow and drive traffic because the more content we have, the more interest for the Canadian Premier League. Besides, streaming platforms compete for content. So One Soccer is not quite there yet, but it's one of our number one objectives to become more relevant with people watching games outside the stadiums.

You are also a managing partner of SixFive sports and entertainment. That's the owner, the owning company of a Pacific FC, right? Could you tell us more about it?

Yes. SixFive sports and entertainment is an investment fund that owns Pacific Football Club, and now we've also acquired the Vancouver Football Club. Of course, everybody talked about how you can own two clubs in one league, but the way it's structured is more of an investment fund. There's an entirely separate operation.

Investors have a lot of interest in football, but they can't invest in a football club and don't know what's happening. With our investment fund, investors can now have the opportunity to invest in football with operators like ourselves who has the knowledge, the network, and an opportunity to invest in the Canadian Premier League without just spending a whole fortune. Most people can't buy a football club in the Canadian League because it's very expensive, and so this provides a chance for a lot of smaller people that want to invest in the game but don't know how.

And with the growth of football in Canada, it's an exciting investment. You've probably seen how the MLS clubs' values went from \$10 million to \$500 million, LAFC even worth \$800 million. We're not going to be at that level, but there's a growth opportunity and investments.

We also have other opportunities to invest in Europe like Austria and create a multi-club model with their investment funds. So this strategy allows us to become more efficient and centralized, maybe in scouting and marketing, thus allowing us to hire better people. So it's just a way to scale a little bit better. So that's SixFive sports, and we started the investment fund about a year ago. So we're just starting to gain a lot of traction right now.

So anyone who wants to invest in football could get in touch with you to invest, right?

So if you want to invest in the Canadian Premier League and believe it's going to grow and become more valuable with Canada and the World Cup. But you don't have \$20 million to invest in the football club. How could you be a part of this? That's where we provide that opportunity. It allows many people, especially those in the community and Vancouver, to have small investments or a small piece of the club. This is important for people who want to invest small amounts and feel like they're contributing.

You're owning one club, owning the rights for a second club that is not yet playing, and you're looking for at least one club in Europe. So what's the plan for that?

That's our short-term plan for the next 18 months in Vancouver. We just announced the location a couple of weeks ago, and now we're promoting the brand and the club next month, most likely in June, and then we're kicking a ball in next season. So Vancouver, or whatever we're going to name, will kick a ball in the Canadian Premier League next year. So it'll be the ninth team. Hopefully, we will acquire a European club in the next short term - 6 months. Then that creates a nice portfolio with the foundation that will always be Canadian football because that's our passion, and that's where I think the most opportunity is. But I think Europe is always Europe, and I believe there are still many opportunities to invest in the right European clubs. And then we have other ancillary opportunities such as marketing, or we're actually starting a stadium company where we can build small stadiums, so it's a little bit more than just football. But football is the core investment of SixFive Sports.

Interesting! Why a stadium-building company? Or is there something more than that?

We're so far behind in Canada regarding football infrastructure. There are not even 100 football stadiums, but there's a growing league. We have created a second division now that we call League One Canada. So now we're starting the second division in Canada. They need small stadiums like 2,000-4,000-seat stadiums. So we partnered with one of the biggest stadium manufacturers in Asia to have them come to Canada and North America to build these. These small football stadiums are just as important as anything else. We're doing this to build infrastructure around the country, and it doesn't have to be 30,000 capacity. Small stadiums across the country are crucial to grow the game and create our own football culture in this country.

Is that something similar to the USL, which focuses not only on the stadium but also on the development of the surrounding area?

Absolutely. USL is doing a fantastic job by creating their own little niche right. The way I look at it is a bit society in general. For example, you don't want to drink the

big-brand beers, but the local ones, the ones in America, craft breweries, or you want to support the small coffee shop versus Starbucks. And I see football as an element that creates your own little micro-community where people would rather say hi to the person sitting next to them. People prefer to support that than the big corporate brands, right? This is something happening in the USL zone. Every club that comes up will create a new little community, stadium, and development infrastructure. They're 10-15 years ahead of us, but, to me, we have some more interesting elements with our Canadian Soccer Business owning our own commercial assets, and broadcasting deal with Media Pro.

So you know, having eight clubs playing and the 9th club that is ready to play next season. What's the vision for the league? At least in terms of the number of club members?

Canada is a big country, and I think we've targeted around 16 markets in Canada. It's a pretty simple exercise, just population-wise across Canada, I believe there are 16 to 17 markets that are big enough to support the Canadian Premier League. We also have a lot of investors' interests. The biggest challenge to our growth is the stadium infrastructure. There's a market that investors want, but there's no stadium. So the question is will the city pay for the stadium or the investors? Canada is a very expensive country for land, so buying land to build a stadium is almost impossible. So you would need support from the cities. That's like what we've done in Vancouver and Victoria. Ultimately, our goal is 14 to 16 teams, and it's not a matter of investor interest. There are, in fact, a lot of investors. So that's why we have this slow but sustainable growth. Also, the pandemic slowed things down a bit more. Our goal is to add one team every year, like Vancouver, for the next year. If we get to 16 teams, we can be a very strong and fantastic league. The goal is by the World Cup 2026 in Canada, we can have 14 teams. And I'm very excited to see what it will look like. ■



THE VISION OF BEING TOP 20

Without a doubt, SV Darmstadt 98 has undergone an impressive development in recent years. Consistently positive financial figures, investments in infrastructure and general further development of the club at all levels. We spoke to Managing Director Michael Weilguny about the background to this positive performance.

By Thomas Maurer & Julia Putzger

The sales figures at SV Darmstadt 98 are quite constant, and there has also been an annual profit. In the difficult times of the pandemic, that's not something that can be taken for granted. How did you manage that?

Since we were promoted back to professional soccer in 2014 and until 2021, we have always made profit - not only in the Bundesliga years, but also in the second league years. That has helped us get through the last two years of the corona crisis. We were even able to make another profit in the 2021 corona year. However, we will close the 2021/22 fiscal year with a low seven digit loss. This is due to the pandemic and also the development in TV rights, as there has been a new contract in Germany since the new season which unfortunately leads to a certain decline in overall marketing for us. We were of course delighted about the great clubs along-

side us in the second league in the 2021/22 campaign - Schalke, Hamburg, Bremen and Co. But these clubs are largely listed ahead of us in the TV rankings, which is why we had to absorb a very high drop of around six million euros from the 20/21 season to the 21/22 season. You can't counteract that in one year. We have to deal with it, but thanks to the previous years, we can cope well.

With total sales of 30 million, six million is no small matter. Nevertheless, how much potential is there for increasing sales?

In the case of TV rights, revenue increases by around five percent every year thanks to a staircase system. Of course, the annual battle for a place in the standings is also one for a place in the TV rankings. But with sporting consistency, we will again see a certain increase. With our own commercial revenues from sponsorship and merchandising, an

increase of even 20 to 30 percent is certainly possible in the next few years. Thanks to the new stadium, we will have a better starting situation in the future: For the first time, there are boxes, there are more business seats and generally more third-party marketing opportunities. Of course, we are also working intensively on the topics of digitization and CSR strategy.

What is the approximate amount of these revenues?

We currently have around eight million euros in sponsorship. In merchandising, we are in the high six-figure range. The potential increase of 20 to 30 percent in each of these two areas won't happen from one season to the next, but that's definitely the goal over the next few years.

What would promotion mean financially?

The jump I just mentioned could even happen directly and independently of the other issues. On the one hand, because there are already completely different sums in the contracts. On the other hand, the Bundesliga would also make us interesting for national, supra-regional partners. Nevertheless, the biggest trigger in the Bundesliga is the media market, where we would increase from the current figure of around €12 million to around €30 million. That's roughly a factor of 2.5.

So, are sponsors primarily local or regional at the moment?

That depends on the sector. We certainly have national and supra-regional partners: Krombacher, for example, a national beer partner, or Craft as a supplier. Recently we have announced the partnership with "28 Black", the producer of the energy drink as

well as our new betting-partner NEO.bet. But 80 percent of our revenues come from regional partners. That's pretty typical for the second league. But with our new mission statement and clear positioning it is our goal is to become interesting for national partners. That's the aspiration in the second league, too.

Can you give some more information on the mission statement?

Last year, we communicated a mission statement for the first time, with a clear vision and mission. The ambitious sporting goal for Darmstadt 98 is that we want to establish ourselves in the top group of the second league in the long term and also challenge the top 20 in soccer. However, we have also tried not to just put the sporting side in, but to emphasize that social values are important to us. We want to be a role model and take a clear stand against discrimination. We are a very diverse club with a very lively fan scene, and we actively support 50+1, reasonable ticket prices and so on. In summary, the mission statement is a triad of sport, social responsibility and economic stability.

When working on the mission statement, were there any specific issues where you have tried to set yourself apart from other clubs or other sports in the region? Saying, for example, "That's not us, that's what sets us apart from others"? Or was the focus purely on SV Darmstadt?

It would be a lie if we didn't look left and right. But of course, every club has to look at what fits its own identity. You can't artificially turn a 124-year-old football club around 180 degrees just to make its positioning on the market fit. But we didn't want to do that either. That's why we developed the mission statement from within the club. It wasn't a decision made by the management or the executive committee alone; it was developed together with many stakeholders. First and foremost, the employees, the fans and the members. But we also asked journalists and sponsors how they see SV Darmstadt 98 and what development potential they believe the club has. We wanted to generate credible themes in the mission statement. We wanted to emphasize and focus even more strongly on the things that the club has already stood for in recent years. Many of the things that

"You can't artificially turn a 124-year-old football club around 180 degrees just to make its positioning on the market fit."

Michael Weilguny

are now anchored in the mission statement were already clear in the back of our minds beforehand. However, by working them out and formulating them, this becomes clearer and more applicable in the daily work.

What other sports organizations are there in the region that are competitors? From which you must stand out or differentiate yourself?

In the Rhine-Main-Neckar conurbation, there are of course a number of competing soccer locations: Frankfurt, Mainz or Hofenheim are all not far from Darmstadt. In other regions of Germany, it is possible that you almost have a unique selling point in soccer within a radius of 100 kilometers. Right in Darmstadt, we don't have any competition from any other major team sport, we're the only sport with a lot of spectators. And the region of southern Hesse, Darmstadt and the neighboring counties are large enough for us to do well here as a club in terms of acquiring sponsors and spectators.

You mentioned earlier that a CRM strategy is being worked on. What is the general situation with sales, distribution and sponsorship? Is that done internally or are there partners?

Basically - and this also applies to many other areas - we try to do things ourselves. We own 100 percent of all rights. That applies to both the stadium and the marketing rights, where we have never had an exclusive marketing agreement. That's mainly because sponsorship is our second-largest revenue generator alongside TV revenues. That is



our absolute core business. That's why it's incredibly important for us to manage this ourselves, to have a direct line to our partners. That's why we decided to set up our own structures.

Let's briefly return to the topic of increasing sales: In some areas, you are continuously developing and innovating. Are there also fields that can generate entirely new revenue streams, such as digitization?

Digitization is definitely a topic we are working on very intensively, both in the B2B and B2C areas. As far as the B2C area is concerned, we have very good reach on social media. Not only do the "classic" channels Facebook and Instagram play an important role, but now also TikTok, where we reach an exciting, very young target group. This is certainly still in the beginning, but thanks to the good reach, there is a lot of potential and that is why we are trying to market this even better and convert it into actual revenue.

In the B2C area, we have recently invested a lot in the basics: We launched a new app, the homepage will be completely redesigned at the end of the year, and we introduced a new CRM system. Overall, the aim is to become even better at addressing customers and ultimately generate further revenue.

What did the work look like before the new CRM system?

We had a smaller CRM system in the B2B area. In the different departments, for example ticketing, membership management or merch, we worked with different silos. Now we are trying to bring these topics together via a CRM system and thus become better in service and marketing. With the support of our main sponsor Software AG and its webMethods integration platform, we will be able to connect the various applications (App, Ticketing, Online Shop, CRM) in the future without having to invest in a completely new IT infrastructure. Single sign-on (SSO) will subsequently enable our fans to gain rapid access to the club's services and offerings via a single authentication process. Of course, implementation takes time. We are in the middle of it, but we are also already trying to launch the first campaigns. We can't provide any figures at the moment, but it's promising and it's obvious that this issue will have a positive impact.

Has this also created need for new personnel or is it just an innovation on the technical side?

There will be a CRM manager who will actively work with the tool, support all departments and be responsible for the digital campaigns.

Besides the new CRM system and social media, are there other topics in the area of digitization that are to be given greater focus in the future?

There is already a lot of scope in these two areas, and I think we would do well to focus first on developing these topics and understanding the possibilities. We want to get the things we tackle right, rather than being all over the place and then neglecting topics in terms of intensity.

In addition to the mission statement, is there a general corporate strategy that says something like how you want to move forward, where you want to be in five years, where the focus areas are, and the like?

We have already expressed much of this in the mission statement. For us, this is really an internal strategy that doesn't just apply to the green lawn on Saturday afternoons, but to all departments. In addition to digitization, the topic of sustainability is particularly close to our hearts. We want to develop even further in this area, but we have also already done a lot in recent years. For example, back in 2012 - as the first third-league club at the time, as far as I know - we launched our first CSR campaign and thus built up a concept and a certain credibility. We want to keep at it and give ourselves an ESG strategy. Not just because the topic is "trendy," but because it has always been part of the club's philosophy. This should be emphasized even more strongly in order to arouse interest among national and supra-regional partners and to make a credible appearance.

The topic of sponsorship is also becoming more challenging: The days are gone when I only sold advertising time on the LED wall according to CPM. That still happens, of course. But there are many partners who, in addition to presence, are primarily interested in brand values, in a digital strategy, in sustainability strategies, and thus want to implement interesting concepts in the club. That is very important for us.

Who determines these focus topics in the club? Is that the responsibility of the management or is there a specialist for corporate development?

Basically, our structure is that of a registered club, and we want to keep it that way. This means that the elected executive committee is responsible for managing the club. The operational strategy is then developed by the management in consultation with the executive committee. In our case, there are two people: Martin Kowalewski, who is mainly responsible for marketing and sales, and me, mainly responsible for commercial issues and the stadium renovation. But the transitions are fluid and we are not organized strictly top-down. As I already mentioned, for example, in the development of the mission statement: When we decide on new focal points, this is preceded by a development process in which we involve all operational departments and also inquire about topics on an interdisciplinary basis.

Where do you see the greatest potential for further development at SV Darmstadt?

The stadium issue is definitely a huge step for us, even though other clubs have already taken it. We are now at around 80 percent in the marketing of boxes, hospitality seats and the like, and we are noticing that we can attract many new companies thanks to the modern infrastructure. In the first instance, this concerns the hospitality sector, but these are of course also partners with whom we are trying to enter into further cooperation agreements. That gives us an enormous tailwind, because it means we can expand our target group yet again.

In addition, we certainly see the potential in the clear positioning of the club, as mentioned in the mission statement. I would say that we already have a certain credibility, but that we still need to optimize the whole concept, expand it, and communicate it better.

How many non-sporting employees are there at SV Darmstadt 98 in total?

We have around 35 full-time employees who take care of management. We're building that up slowly and growing steadily.

We've already touched on the subject of the top 20, but I'd like to go into more detail: How did this goal of attacking the top

20 come about? Ultimately, top 20 means a promotion spot in the second league.

That's right, that's our vision. But by definition, a vision is not a goal that can be achieved in the next year or two, but rather a longer-term goal. On the other hand, we have deliberately chosen an ambitious goal that is achievable but will not be reached in any case. We discussed this a lot. But setting ambitious targets is also part of our brand values; we want to be bold and ambitious. We haven't done badly in recent years - sometimes surprisingly - and we're not playing badly this season either. So, it was logical to aim for the top. The image of challenge of Darmstadt 98 appeals to many of our partners. I think with a vision you simply must go forward courageously and not emphasize the status quo, otherwise it wouldn't be a vision. Of course, this is measurable in sports and you are also held up to it from time to time, but the bottom line is that it should motivate all departments to move forward courageously.

From a sporting point of view, it's relatively easy to benchmark the goal of challenging the top 20. But how does that work on the economic side?

Among other things, we are guided by benchmark figures, for example from the annual DFL economic report. On the basis of certain clusters, for example in the areas of marketing, ticketing, merch, we can see where we stand. But it would be too short-sighted to compare sales on a one-to-one basis, because every club is different, and you have to be realistic. The figures do help us formulate our goals, and of course there's the competition to consider. Ultimately, however, it's a mixture of numerical targets and content-related issues, soft skills.

What are the current developments at the stadium, where a lot of construction work has been done in recent years?

The rapid promotion from the third league to the Bundesliga within 24 months was surprising for us ourselves, and the club infrastructure was in no way ready for professional soccer at the time. So since 2015/16, the club infrastructure has been completely turned around, so to speak. We started building training grounds, then the administrative buildings with one floor for all the of-



Michael Weilguny Managing Director, SV Darmstadt 98

fice-staff and one floor for the professionals.

It's great and very motivating, especially for the office, to have a direct line to the coaching team, the manager and the players. This is not an anonymous office building at the other end of town, but we have everything together here: Stadium, training ground, administration building.

Since 2016, we've been rebuilding the stands piece by piece: First the two head stands, then the opposite stand and now, in the final construction phase, the main stand, which should be finished by the end of the year. And in between, in 2017, we built the youth performance center at the station. Infrastructure development is never finished and there will certainly be more projects, but for a second-division club we have already created a very good infrastructure. The stadium is also suitable for the Bundesliga. We have room for just under 18,000 spectators. We were also bound by the building regulations at the site. But that's basically a figure that we can deal with reasonably here for the time being.

This development is impressive. How is it all being financed?

Of course, the stadium accounts for the lion's share of the investment. We have received public subsidies from the city and the state of Hesse. But we invested the biggest part of over 20 million ourselves, mostly through loans, with smaller portions also through equity.

As far as the stadium is concerned, we and the city had no choice but to invest. The stadium was 30 years old, and due to the club's negative sporting interlude in the 1990s and 2000s, nothing more was invested, of course. This affected not only comfort, but also safety regulations. ■

“COLO-COLO IS CHILE”

Colo-Colo is famous for their iconic name and logo. But what is behind that? We talked to Colo-Colos Chief Commercial & Marketing Officer Samuel Pérez about their presence in Chile, recent developments, stadium plans and tough times the country’s biggest club faced a few years ago.

By Thomas Maurer

Colo-Colo is the most popular club in Chile – what does that exactly mean, do you have any numbers?

Colo-Colo is by far the most popular club in Chile. Around 42% of the population declares to be a fan of the club. We have the biggest fanbase in every region across the country, in every socioeconomic and age group and the media coverage of anything related to the Club is daily. There are 2 very famous sayings: “Colo-Colo IS Chile” and “When Colo-Colo wins the bread is crunchier and the tea is sweeter the day after”.

How many supporters do you have in absolute numbers?

According to the last official survey from 2019 (has been postponed due to Covid19)

we have around 8 million fans in Chile. In social media we have already hit more than 5 million followers across the main platforms.

Are there also supporters outside of Chile?

We have seen a lot of interest from abroad. There are 2 main reasons: The first one is related to Chileans living abroad. We have a big fanbase in the US, Australia, Brazil, Nordic countries, etc. The second one is that our iconic badge (The Mapuche Colo-Colo), our name and the history of our foundation plus the success we have had on the pitch are very interesting for some far away countries. For example, when we won in 1992 the Recopa in Japan our victory and

credentials remained in the minds of many Japanese fans who were there that day.

In 2019/20 you played one of the worst seasons ever – you were close to relegation, for the first time. What happened?

It was a mixture of situations. We experienced some issues in the sporting aspect but also in the administrative side. You also have to take into consideration that we are the only team who has never been relegated in Chile and we actually had to play a relegation playoff game at the end of the 2020 season. I think one of the most important factors was that a big team is used to playing finals and that kind of pressure is completely different from being in the bottom part of the table playing each weekend

fighting to get out of there. Also, we had an aged squad, and you have to consider that the pandemic interrupted the league for about 6 months with most of this time not being able to train at any facility. Fortunately we managed to win that game with the extraordinary support of our fans. The game was played 255 kms away from Santiago and during the entire trip you could see our fans at the side of the highway cheering the players. That trip usually takes 2.5 hours and we only managed to get to the hotel after a 7 hour drive.

You mentioned it, the championship was interrupted due to the pandemic for about 6 months. You didn’t perform well. The technical and the main sponsor left the club during the pandemic. And then?

Uff, and then we had to give our best and deliver a massive job. It was such a big challenge. In June we parted ways with our technical sponsor, and we were under pressure considering the timings of clothing. In a few weeks we contacted 35 different supplier brands and at the end we received 4 very interesting offers. Finally, we closed one of the biggest deals with adidas for 6 years. An iconic brand who returned to partner with us after almost 30 years, when we won the Copa Libertadores in 1991. For the main sponsor I would say the challenge was even bigger. We contacted 117 companies. Firstly, the ones we targeted and had under our radar, but we were in the middle of a pandemic and locked down plus in the bottom of the table, so we received a lot of nos. In the end, and only a month before changing to the new adidas shirt, we managed to find an extraordinary partner, Pilsen del Sur a new beer from ABInbev, without reducing the value of our FoS.

The following season you finished second. What happened after that awful season 2019/20?

Relegation pressure was off, and no one wanted to live that again. That is for sure. We also made a massive restructuring of the squad. Many players left and a lot of youngsters stood up. Now we have a very young squad being led by a great coach like Gustavo who was indeed in charge when we managed to avoid relegation. The year

after we won the cup and finished second (it’s good to mention that we had to play 2 games with U17 players due to covid. Otherwise, we might have won the league) which allowed us to qualify to Conmebol Libertadores. At the start of this year, we already won the Supercup in January, and our goal is to win our 33rd league title.

Sponsoring is the biggest part of the club’s revenues. Can you give us some insights into the figures – average annual revenue, distribution of the different revenue streams and how are the other clubs in Chile doing compared to Colo-Colo?

Sponsoring is the biggest revenue stream for us, yes. It comprises around 40% of the total regular revenues. I am not considering player transfers although in the past 10 years only once this section was higher than the sponsoring revenues. Our all-time highest in sponsoring was in 2018 with a bit more than 15M USD. This good trend was stopped due to the social unrest we had in 2019 and Covid but we are very proud with what we did during 2021. Our sponsoring revenues were 91% higher than the year before and we reached the second highest sponsoring revenue of all-time. This will position ourselves back in the first place of all the clubs in Chile for sponsoring revenues and for 2022 the picture looks even better.

Where do the sponsoring partners come from, are they mainly domestic companies or also international brands?

Both. In the past years we have seen an increasing number of international brands partnering with us since the club is one of the best platforms to introduce a new brand or product into the country. This is mainly due to the daily exposure we have in the media and the impact of having 42% of the population as fans. Some success cases like MG Motor, Under Armour, DIRECTV go or Pilsen del Sur have been notable and other international brands are seeing that impact and value.

How many people are working for the club all in all, and how many without sports-related staff?

We are a bit more than 200 employees.

Let’s talk about digitalisation. Is that a big topic in Chilean football and at Colo-Colo?

It’s slowly getting the importance it needs but not as fast as in some other leagues in Europe or US. For us it is key. We have developed a fan dashboard which nurtures from all the different information sources we have like ticketing, ecommerce, app and others. Now we can identify fans by a varied range of variables and see how they have been interacting in the last months with our platforms. To give you an example. In 2021 we managed to increase the traffic to our ecommerce site by 250% which then meant an 300% increase in sales compared to 2020 (in 2020 we already increased 30% compared to 2019). This is all thanks to digitalisation.

“In the past years we have seen an increasing number of international brands partnering with us since the club is one of the best platforms to introduce a new brand or product into the country.”

Samuel Pérez

Tokenisation is a big topic in football right now, do you have ambitions in that regard as well?

We have been looking at this for several months already. We have talked with many players in that industry so we can get to know and learn as much as we can in order to define a strategy and get the best result. There are too many options and variables to take into account in our opinion. And it is such a moving industry that what we thought a year ago is not the same as we think now.



Samuel Pérez Chief Commercial & Marketing Officer, Colo-Colo



Photo: Alejandro Canales S.

Do you sell digital sponsoring assets?

We do. We created our digital assets portfolio. Most of them are being added to the sponsors packages when we close a new deal, others have been tested and used with current partners to get metrics and evaluate its performance. We are also developing with the communications team a wide range of exclusive in-house content in order to provide the fans with new content which will be very interesting for brands to be part of.

You did a documentary about Colo-Colo's female football team. What is the status quo here, what goals do you have with that documentary?

It was one of the most exciting projects we did last year. We partnered with an agency and a current sponsor of ours (DIRECTV go) and followed the team for around 6 months recording and creating content. Not only training sessions, trips and while staying at hotels but also, we wanted to show more about the personal life of some of our players. The documentary had extraordinary feedback from our fans, viewership in DIRECTV and then in our YouTube channel and 2 other brands decided to join this project. We are now evaluating to do a second season and taking lessons from the first year.

Basically, what role does the Women's

team have within the club?

Women's football is still developing around the world, and here in Chile it is the same. We decided a few years ago to be an example for the rest of the clubs. We are the only team to have all its players with a professional contract and we are pushing every day to provide more to them. We managed to close a few specific sponsoring deals and when the media don't show a game (they only cover one game per weekend) played at our home we make sure we stream the match for our fans. We have been recognized by FIFA in 2020 for what we have done for Women's football.

In 2019 you developed the idea to renew the stadium. Due to the social riots back then you decided to dismiss the plan. Now this is a topic again especially with regard to the World Cup bid for 2030. What are the plans?

Right now, the plan is to resume the project. We need to improve the experience of our fans on match days and for that we need a big change in our stadium. So now we are having some discussions about the masterplan and all the different ways there are to be able to finance such a big project. We hope we can have some important news in the short term.

Is internationalisation a topic for you? Especially taking in consideration, that

the potential to grow within the domestic market is already very limited.

I think the domestic market still has a lot of potential. There are too many brands that haven't yet realised the power and impact sports can have in their strategy. There is no better tool to get close to their customers. Also, there are many new brands entering the Chilean market and that is a very good opportunity for us due to what I explained before in a previous question. But, as you mentioned, internationalisation is indeed a topic for us. It's part of our mid-term strategy as commercial department.

Where do you look at – South or North America? Europe?

At the end everywhere, but the steps will depend on many factors like for example: the markets we have identified to have Colo-Colo fans or to have some kind of interest according to data we have gathered through some partners, countries where former players are currently playing and acting like ambassadors and very importantly markets, we can reach along with some partners like adidas.

Years ago, you sold a TV sports channel, founded by the Chilean football clubs, to TNT. They now own all the media rights, right?

They do. They bought the rights for 15 years which will end in 2033. ■

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STRATEGIC VEHICLE TO DEVELOP A PROFESSIONAL CLUB'S FOOTBALL DEPARTMENT

Introducing the concept of a club-individual football strategy board.

Guest article by Matthias Dombrowski & Dietmar Beiersdorfer

The professional football industry is fast-moving, dynamic, versatile and sentiment related. Major decisions of club executives do not stay behind closed doors, they are immediately assessed by many stakeholders with different levels of interest in the club's activities. Most prominently, the decisions of football executives, namely Managing Director Sports, Sporting Director, Technical Director, Head Coach, write the headlines of media outlets both online and offline. The reason? Short-term results of the men's first team are in the spotlight. Results on the pitch matter most. This is probably true but being exclusively narrow-focused on the short-term sportive performance and success of the first team may cause negative effects on the club's competitive position in the medium- to long-term. This is the reason why the desire to create a strategic vehicle to develop our club's football department with its sub-departments in a sustainable and predominantly independent way, has arisen.

There are several key drivers, motives, or reasons respectively why we designed, developed, and implemented our individual Football Strategy Board (FSB) for our

club FC Ingolstadt 04 which are outlined subsequently. Firstly, it is our unequivocal aspiration to utilize and further develop the football knowledge and football competencies of our club's sports management protagonists. We are convinced that "absorbing" their football fundamentals and assumptions in a structured and rather formalized way will contribute to a successful development of our club's football department. They are highly involved in a variety of football operations and therefore experts in their respective fields of activity. Secondly, we strive for establishing a strategic platform to discuss, analyse, evaluate, and advance important and potential rich football-related core topics and projects. We believe that these in-depth, guided conversations will generate an added value. Thirdly, we want to leave aside the short-term orientated, fast-paced professional football inherent mechanisms – at least to a certain extent. Surely, being at the core of a professional football club inevitably comprises the frequently so-called "momentum" which refers to the relevance and urgency of recent performances and results. We are absolutely aware of this condition, but we consider it as our responsibility to

contemplate our club from a meta level perspective from time to time to exploit potentials and contribute positively to our club's business strategy and development. We endeavour to catalyse time and space to develop a mid- and long-term vision for our club and set milestones which guide us on our path. Furthermore, in establishing the FSB we see the opportunity to instal an "operative supervisory board" that is responsible for measuring and evaluating the self-paved road.

The above outlined main motives are surrounded by a few key questions which are strongly connected with the core of the FSB: What is an appropriate, target-focused way to define, evaluate, and potentially adjust our strategic goals within the football department? From a meta level point of view, to what extent are our club's football executives and leaders able and willing to reflect upon our club's basic football principles? How can we create a vehicle to evaluate our training philosophy and training concept without being biased by recent results of our teams and short-term developments? What competencies need to be represented in the board and could a too tight

special competency aggregation lead to an "overkill" in terms of reaching the goals of the FSB?

After presenting our main motives as well as the key questions related to the FSB of our club, FC Ingolstadt 04, we now take a thorough look at the key functions the FSB is intended to comply with. The kick-off itself relates to the critical evaluation of existing and the identification or definition respectively of new strategic goals for our club's football area. We aim for deriving operative sub-goals that should flow smoothly into the different departments of our organization. Furthermore, the FSB functions as a board for discussing, evaluating, and assessing superordinate football- and performance-related topics (e. g. training concept, academy player to pro transition, player development pathway, athletic and strength training, cognitive/mental performance). The FSB is also intended to be an intermediary between our club's football sub-departments "first team", "youth academy" and "sports strategy, development and innovation" that helps to link and compress relevant, "all-encompassing" information appropriately. The actual flow of day-to-day information takes place at the operative level through scheduled, rather formalized meetings as well as informal conversations. Making major decisions with impact on a variety of stakeholders are one essential part of leading and managing a professional football club. Thus, our club's FSB is an important platform to prepare necessary, upcoming decisions as well as to evaluate and reflect upon taken decisions ex-post. Identifying possibly trendsetting, potential rich (mainly from a football development but also from a commercial perspective) and performance-optimizing thematic areas are further key tasks for the members of the FSB.

You might wonder why we have not addressed the personnel composition of our club's FSB so far. Here is the simple reason: We enormously focus on the key content elements of the FSB. First and foremost, it should not depend on specific persons in the long-term; it is more about the strategic approach and superordinate direction of FC Ingolstadt 04. But of course, a theo-

retically designed model like the FSB does not work without forward-thinking, competent, and football-loving people who develop ideas and concepts, have fruitful discussions, and aim for shaping the future of the club with serious interest. The following positions form the core of FC Ingolstadt 04's FSB: Managing Director Sports, Sporting Director, Head of Youth Academy, Head of Sports Youth Academy, Head of Sports Strategy, Development, and Innovation, Executive Assistant to the Managing Director as well as Head of Play Concept and Coaching Practice. The prior mentioned positions play key roles in our club's football department and are responsible for short-, medium- and long-term results on and off the pitch. In the daily, fast-paced football business it is a perceptible, often significant challenge to deal with superior focus topics and projects. Thus, it is even more important that our club's football executives have a "free-floating", kind of independent space to bundle and expand their football-related expertise.

In this article's final paragraph, we briefly address the structure and procedure of our club's FSB meetings. Our regular meeting, taking place every six weeks, lasts 90 minutes with some extra time possible and consider this as our own "strategic football match". Additionally, there are special meetings with internal or external speakers

who contribute a keynote about topically appropriate contents. The alternating guest speakers shall ideally provide inspiration and stimuli from an outside-in view. It can be managers, coaches, analysts, scouts, psychologists, technical directors, and other highly skilled and qualified people with a specific expertise in a particular topic. Each regular meeting starts with a short intro about the agenda and a recap of the last session. All participants receive the agenda in advance to prepare themselves. It is deliberately chosen that there are not more than two key topics on the agenda. In a co-operative manner, the FSB members determine which of the discussed aspects should be communicated with other people within the organization. Because of the FSB's inherent "strategic element" with mid- to long-term orientation it is necessary and important to spread new insights at an appropriate time. As expressed at the beginning, we need to and want to achieve the optimum and maximum performance on the pitch against each opponent, every weekend, with all our professional and youth teams. Concurrently, developing our club's future in a strategically structured, target-oriented, and enduring manner is our clear ambition. Our Football Strategy Board is one of our impactful and beneficial vehicles that accompanies us on our journey to perform at our best as a team. ■



Photos: FC Ingolstadt 04

18 EXAMPLES OF FOOTBALL SOCIAL MEDIA TEMPLATES

Social media templates are a great way to speed up your content creation process, cover live games and visualize complex match information – a must to keep football fans engaged – all while locking in quality and brand consistency.

By Frank Festen, Content Stadium

Get inspiration for your own set of templates with the below 18 topic ideas to cover matchdays and beyond. These also include suggestions on what to include in your graphics, alongside example visuals which our clients created using their Content Stadium templates.

Need a helping hand? Learn more about how we can set you up with your own set of scroll-stopping social media templates at www.contentstadium.com/sports.

Pre-match social media template ideas

Create a buzz of anticipation with pre-match coverage on social media. Posting content with insights into the game, teams, players and more, ahead of kick-off, will help engage your fans early on and get them prepped and excited for the match to come.

1. Matchday announcement

Remind fans on when to tune into the next match with eye-catching visuals. Make sure your template includes the day and time of the game, as well as the teams who will be competing. You may also want to add animated elements to drive up excitement.

2. Starting line-up

Let your fans know who will start for their favorite team, and in which position they'll be playing.

Social media carousels come in handy here, to highlight specific players as well as the full team formation. Adding individual player introduction videos also helps to add personality and energy to your line-up graphic.

3. Head-to-heads

Pit opponents against one another before the game even begins!

Head-to-head templates are a great way to get the conversation started on social media about who is most likely to come out on top. Try including key data about each team or player in this visual for an additional talking point.

4. Betting odds

Get your fans involved with a bet. Recap the betting odds for the upcoming game, or highlight the single or multiple bets that can lead to the biggest wins.

Templates for live game coverage

Get your templates ready to accompany the ups and downs of the 90 minutes in real-time on social media with these football template ideas.

If you're a club, try to have templates ready in both your home and away kits. Having the same colors both on and off the pitch

will help immerse your fans further into the action.

5. Goals and score updates

Goals are the highlights of most football games. So your goal social media graphics should reflect that.

Think animations, GIFs, player cutouts, bold texts, and powerful designs, to ensure your social media post feeds into the excitement. You can also help fans relive this moment of triumph with a goal sequence template, that highlights each player who was involved in getting the ball to the back of the net.

6. Half-time update

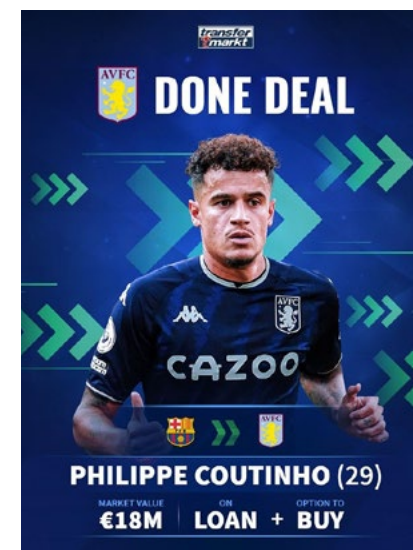
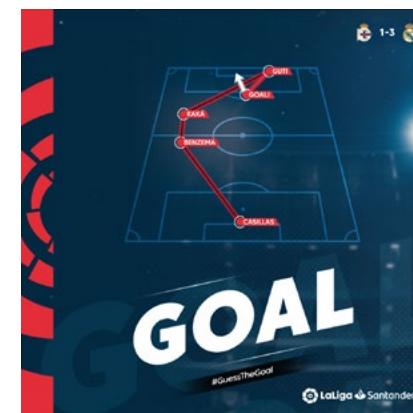
Update your fans half way through the game with a recap of the action so far. This could include a simple update on the half-time scores, or a summary of any key game data or match highlights so far.

7. Substitutions, cards and penalties

Keep fans updated on every twist and turn during the match. Get your substitutions, red and yellow cards, and penalties templates ready to highlight these key moments on social media as they happen.

8. Final score

Mark the end of the match with a final result social media template. In addition to the final score and names of the teams, you can also include a memorable photo from the game.



Social media graphics, animations and videos created using Content Stadium templates.

You can also immediately post about what this final score means for the winning team — such as a qualification, promotion or cup winner — with a celebratory graphic.

Post-match football template examples

Cash in on all the excitement of the game by continuing to post content on social media right after the match ended. Celebrate the winning team, revisit the match highlights, and break down the game with stats and figures to keep your fans engaged and revved up for the next match.

9. Match recap

Use match recap templates to replay match highlights, publish photos of the most memorable moments, and break down the game into key stats.

Photo collages that include both stats and visuals are a great way to share a one-slide snapshot of the game. Or you can choose to spread your game summary over a carousel, for a more in-depth match review, including final scores, interviews and stats.

10. Post-match interviews

Hand the mic over to your players, coaches and other key figures to review the event in their own words. This helps to offer another perspective and some unique insights into the game.

Did you only manage to record the audio? No problem. Set up your social media template with an animated audio waveform to grab attention and prompt social media followers to turn up the volume.

11. Game stats

Summarize the key stats of the match in one infographic. To do this in the most efficient (and error-free) way, connect your template directly to your data provider or API. This will allow you to integrate accurate data into your graphic in just a couple of clicks.

12. Individual player stats

With several football stars gathering a bigger following than their own teams or leagues, spotlighting individual player performance can also be key to driving engagement and conversations on your social media channels. You can then also reuse these visuals before the next game, to remind fans of the player's last performance.

Cut out the background of images or use green-screen videos to spotlight the player and turn them into the star of your social media post. Once again, you can connect your template to your data provider or API for quick and accurate data import.

13. Standings and rankings

Now that another game is over, it's time to take a step back and review how the outcome has impacted the rankings for the season or championship so far. Connect your template to your data provider to get this information to your fans in record time.

Templates for outside of game days

Ensure fans stay on your channels outside of match days by continuing to post engaging and informative content. Even when there is no game on, there are still plenty of topics you can post about. Check out just some examples of templates you can use to fill these gaps below.

14. Programs

Start talking about the next match(es) that fans can look forward to with program, schedule or fixture templates. Make sure you include the names and logos of the teams, and time and date of the matches in your visual.

Are your fans scattered around the world? Then be sure to include the time zone alongside the time on display. Or better yet, request a template that includes automatically-generated start times for different time zones across the globe.

15. Player news

Get the conversation going on social media by posting insights and news about individual players.

Is someone moving to another team? How much is that player worth? Which player had the most assists? Who's celebrating their birthday today? Showcase all this information through eye-catching visuals and informative infographics.

16. Team or league stats

And you can do the same for individual leagues, clubs and teams. Share insights into club or national team performances and league-wide stats.

17. Quizzes and voting games

Appeal to your audience's competitive side with a quiz or voting template. Use a quiz to test their football knowledge, or a voting visual to get the debate going. Help them submit their input faster by selecting an emoji to represent each possible answer.

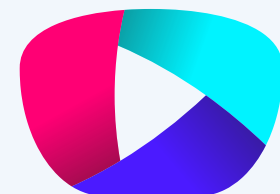
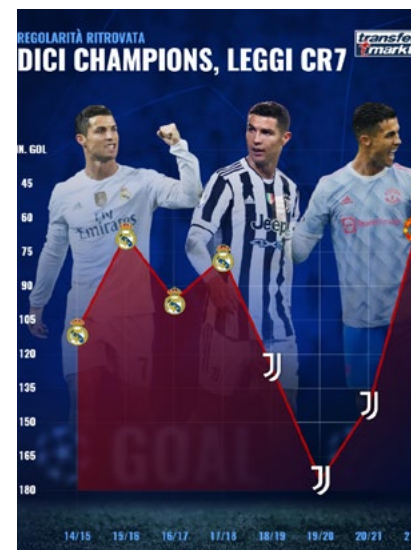
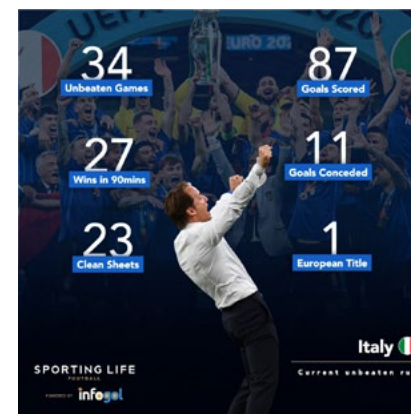
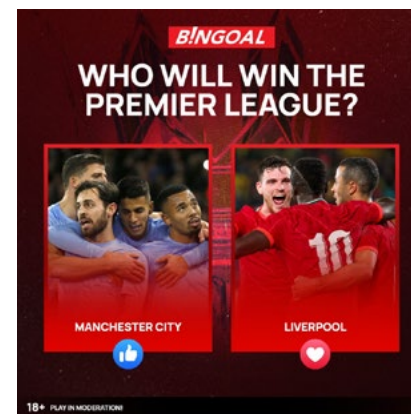
18. Quotes and news

A simple template that allows you to combine a photo with text is a must-have for any football template package. These flexible templates allow you to easily cover a number of different topics. Perfect for quotes and news updates.

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D.C. UNITED'S RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND THE IMPACT OF WAYNE ROONEY'S RETURN AS HEAD COACH

In this article, FBIN talked with Drew Bentley, Senior Director of Business Strategy & Analytics on the club's recent developments, the use of technology and analytics, and Wayne Rooney's comeback with the club.

By Quang T. Pham

Briefly introduce yourself, and your current role at D.C. United.

My name is Drew Bentley. I lead and support the business strategy and analytics group here at D.C. United & Audi Field. Our team is responsible for revenue strategy, analytics, CRM, and ticket operations for D.C. United and all other Audi Field events, including American college football, domestic and international soccer programming, food and wine festivals, concerts, and more. We're focused on bringing as many new types of events to the stadium as possible, to increase our visibility here within the region.

Currently, what would be the most important revenue stream at the club?

Ticketing and partnerships revenue have historically been top generators for most MLS clubs. Additionally, any in-stadium revenues like food and beverage and merchandise are also crucial to growing our business. One that will be relatively new to us (and our fellow MLS clubs) is the new league-wide TV deal with Apple starting in 2023. MLS has not had a consolidated television rights deal in the past, and each team has been free to pursue their own broadcast partnerships in local markets. Hence, a unified platform within Apple next year will allow us to deliver even more fantastic content, have all of our fans in one place, and enable the game to substantially grow in the US hand-in-hand with one of the largest, most influential brands (Apple) in the world.

How did the club cope with Covid-19 pandemic?

The pandemic certainly affected us similarly to every other professional sports organization, but at the same time it did present a few opportunities for our business. Since we weren't spending time activating events, like we normally would have, we spent our time standardizing our processes and ensuring our analytics ecosystem was as optimized as possible. We had time to dive into our historical data in a more granular manner, which aided in our decision-making processes, as we prepared for our return to live events.

How are analytics & technology applied at the club? Which are your key focus areas?

We have a lot of different key focus areas,, but from an overarching perspective: with most major decisions we make, we want to ensure that there's a semblance of data behind it, to help justify and measure the decision and outcome. We're in the process of implementing this strategy across the entire organization, not just one specific department.

On the technology side of things, we utilize 100% mobile ticketing. We have been doing this since our stadium (Audi Field) opened in 2018 and have worked with our partners at Ticketmaster to use our venue to showcase the positive benefits of a fully mobile venue. From a fan-experience perspective, we implemented SafeTix, which sees rotating barcodes and NFC tickets, which help to expedite entry and reduce potential fraud. Essentially, your barcode will update every 15 seconds or you can add it to your Apple/Google Wallet and just need to tap your phone near the scanner, and you go in.

On the analytics side of things, we try to take a three-phased approach when looking at our analytical support for each department at our club. It starts with descriptive analytics, where we want to accurately tell the story of what has occurred. The second phase is to utilize a lot of our descriptive data to fuel our predictive models, or what likely will occur. Put simply, in these two phases, we can tell the story of what has happened and what's likely to happen in the future, with our current set of circumstances. The third and final phase for us utilizes prescriptive analytics, where we combine our first two phases to engineer an outcome or answer the question of "what do we want to happen?" and "how do we structure our efforts to achieve those desired outcomes?" We're working to integrate our efforts across our club and establish a solid foundation of accurate, real-time data so that we're able to provide proactive strategy recommendations to grow our business and enhance our experience, holistically.

From a business perspective, what would you say is the unique selling point of D.C. United?

Each club has unique selling points or value propositions. It comes down to how well we tell our story. How are we connecting to our soccer fans here in the D.C. market? How are we also connecting to general sports fans? As you know, soccer is not the number one sport in the US, so how do we get general sports fans here locally to start getting into soccer for the first time? Or even the person who just wants something fun to do in the city on the weekend? How



do we get them to come out and experience the venue for the first-time, then how do we get them to come back? So we have to tell a story that resonates with each of those core demographics and target markets, and use our data to ensure the right messages get to the right people.

So, I think we've got a unique mix of selling points for our club, but there are a few noticeable ones that come to mind. First, is our state-of-the-art venue - Audi Field. It's a fantastic place to watch a match, with some of the best sightlines in the league. Next, is our new head coach, Wayne Rooney and the style of play he brings to the table. Overall, we're working diligently to identify and enhance elements of our experience that will resonate with our fans and help us grow our club, and MLS as a whole.

How would the arrival of Wayne Rooney impact the club's landscape, MLS and American soccer in general?

Wayne played and captained us here for two years (2018 and 2019), and he electrified the fan base and the D.C. sports community back then. So, as a coach, he's already brought that same kind of winning energy and competitiveness to the team and our fan base. On the pitch, Wayne certainly brings his expertise from years of playing at the highest levels, and the team is really committed to his style of play.

He brings a level of visibility globally to MLS and D.C. United that excites us all. He knows what it takes to be successful in MLS

and is committed to growing the game here in D.C., so it's cool that he's able to bring it full circle, from doing it as a player to now as our head coach.

What are the differences in running a soccer club in America compared to Europe or the rest of the world?

First, how we generate revenues has historically been a little different. The global soccer community has had league-wide television-rights deals for some time, whereas in MLS, each team has had its own deals in each respective market. So, we're excited to see how that changes moving forward, with the league's new TV deal with Apple.

Another interesting point is that in Europe, from what I understand, there's not as much activity on the secondary ticketing market, where fans resell their tickets. That's something really strong here in the U.S., where somebody will buy tickets, and then they can resell them on a few different platforms (i.e., Ticketmaster has a resale platform), so we have to be diligent in monitoring those markets.

Unlike in Europe, where soccer has traditionally been the number one sport in most countries, we have a lot of in-market competition here. Here in Washington, D.C., we have the Washington Wizards (NBA), the Washington Commanders (NFL), Washington Capitals (NHL), the Washington Nationals (MLB), as well as the Washington Spirit (NWSL) and Washington Mystics (WNBA) on the women's side of things, among oth-

er entertainment offerings. D.C. is a global sports and entertainment hub, and we must compete with other sports and teams for valuable market share. Therefore, we must create a story that compels people to spend their time and money at Audi Field, supporting our mission in the community and the growth of our club.

What are your next big projects at D.C. United?

We've got quite a few. First, during this off-season, we're working on a data warehouse and CRM migration with our partners at KORE Software that will allow us to be more efficient and detailed in our approach to data-driven support for all of our business units.

Second, we've got some stadium enhancements on the way, such as new premium spaces, as we look to ensure we have the right offerings for all of our current and prospective fans. We want to make our stadium experience the best we can for the fans and supporters, so this off-season is a big opportunity for us.

Finally, we've been selected to host the 2023 MLS All-Star Game! It's a great chance to have the entire league and many from the global soccer community here in the District. We're excited to host everyone and bring a world-class event to our community here in D.C. and showcase the best that D.C. has to offer. ■

5 INSIGHTS

Mathias Menzl
Head of Digital Products | FC Basel



Is it important as a football club to transform (more) into a media/content company or a lifestyle brand? How do you look at that based on your club's perspective?

We are already doing a lot of content and see ourself as a media company. So that's already important. The question is now to see if we are able to monetise it as well.

Can you describe the process of implementing new non-sports projects at your club? Are you asking your fans for input, do you look at other clubs or industries for inspiration, do you work with market research?

We do usability-tests in the digital product-development and do also regular user surveys for example in order to get the opinion of our fans regarding their matchday experience, catering-experience or digital platform-usage.

What opportunities do you see to attract and bind the younger generation to you as a club – alternative content, content generated by the players on platforms like Twitch, the whole esports development and other ways.

In the content-area we see potential rather in longform and behind-the-scenes-content, insights that only can give the club and not the traditional media. The younger target-group is really keen on this kind of access. Furthermore young people need to be nudged constantly with event-driven content and merchandising.

How can football clubs increase their financial stability and sustainability? Do you think it needs fundamental changes within the football system, like closed leagues, a salary cap or similar?

I cannot really answer this since it's not my area of expertise. What we strategical-

ly try to achieve is generate other areas of income than transfermarket and match-day.

What trends do you see developing in the next 3 years in terms of new commercial opportunities for football and especially your club? Are there any new projects you are currently developing?

We see growth-potential in the segment of the how we call it "stay-at-home-fans". They do not have a seasonticket or are not interested in the traditional club-membership but are interested in the club and are also willing to spend money, rather for merchandising, special editorial content or for web3-based products. ■



It is important to develop other revenue streams than matchday and transfer fees.

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FBIN

A NEW ERA IN DIGITAL SPONSORSHIP

Horizm is one of the industry leaders in sporting sponsorship and data connects brands with sports fans and rights holders with new digital revenues. In this piece they spoke with some of the world's biggest and most influential football teams to understand what digital and sponsorship means in 2022. Learning about the performance metrics, sponsorship perspectives, and how to adapt to an ever changing digital landscape to reach the best results.

How do you think football clubs measure success when it comes to digital sponsorships?

Fraser Read, Head of Marketing, Blackburn Rovers: Measurement used to be very much qualitative but there has been a huge shift in the last few years with a much higher focus placed on quantitative data. All partners will have different metrics to measure based on their initial objectives but it is commonly awareness, engagement and perception or conversion and return on investment. I also think there is a level of importance placed on value for money versus other opportunities such as paid social or other media.

Alexander Mühl, Director Marketing and Digitization, Borussia Dortmund: Currently I'd say the convention is to use the classic model also in digital. Reach and Awareness are the predominant KPIs. I expect that to change over the next years though, with advertisers aiming for more mid- and lower funnel activations also in sponsoring.

Panagiotis Aroniadis, New Media Director, PAOK: It depends what department you have in mind because football can become a battle between different worlds!! A CFO would measure success on income and revenues. A marketing director would look for a successful activation with nice branding and awareness metrics. A communications

director on brand value with the correct narrative that serves the club's strategy. A digital director would search for engagement, organic reach, impressions and this kind of metrics. The correct answer I suppose includes all the above mentioned aspects.

Brittany Arner, VP, Ticketing & Hospitality, York United: I think the North American market is slow to adopt digital sponsorships as it relates to fan content and engagement. Most that I come across are standard image graphics (starting XI, etc).

Jamie Thomas, Marketing Manager, Hull City FC: I think it comes down to two things really, revenue earned and reputation of the brands associating themselves with yours. The exposure and engagement metrics are obviously important too, as are the working relationships with the people representing the partner brands. Success then has to be clearly showing you have provided, and ideally slightly exceeded, the value of the contract agreement. Horizm is great as it will allow us track that value provided more accurately than ever before, and enable us to adapt strategy throughout the duration of the agreement should we need to.

Menino Pereira, Partnerships Research and Insights Lead, Arsenal: Revenue – which is direct if it's a media only deal and then attributable for new sponsorships and

“The North American market is slow to adopt digital sponsorships as it relates to fan content and engagement.”



Brittany Arner
VP, Ticketing & Hospitality
York United

renewals (depending on how key digital was to the deal and inventory included) and Fanbase growth which comes with certain types of sponsors.

Nuno Bernardes Pombo, Research Manager, Sporting Clube de Portugal: At a domestic level, we are aware that the digital MKT teams of practically all the 1st League Clubs are fully dedicated to this branch of the operation (activation measurement). However, the way they do it is quite variable and depends on the strategy and budget that each Club/Department allocates for this process. There are those who only work “only” the statistics that each social network provides and then there are the other Clubs that activate platforms specialized in the monetization of activations, which in addition to giving performance numbers

for each activation, manage to value them and measure the return of media exposure of them. Fortunately, Sporting CP is in this 2nd field, with a team dedicated to this valorization process and has 2 active licenses on different platforms for the valorization of digital content, which help to value our entire ecosystem.

How do you think team performance impacts the sponsorship metrics for brands? If at all?

Fraser Read: It always helps when you're winning but I personally try to build more of a holistic approach to the campaigns we run so that we can deliver for partners throughout the season, regardless of the results on the pitch. It goes back to the old saying 'control the controllable'.

Alexander Mühl: I think the effect on the quantitative side is definitely strong. Better sporting performance translates in higher reach, especially among users who are loosely connected to the club.

Panagiotis Aroniadis: Since it affects the engagement rates and the mentality sentiments it's normal that it affects the metrics as well. At this point I must highlight a football paradox. Bad results sometimes might end up presenting more valuable metrics than a good result because the fans tendency to comment on clubs' losses and express their anger, leads to higher engagement rates. Then to have to see if this bad engagement is actually good for the brand associated with the club.

Brittany Arner: Speaking for our own club, the metrics suggest a much higher engagement rate on non-performance based con-

tent - think Q&As with players and TikTok dance moves. Especially if the on-pitch product isn't great...

Jamie Thomas: For clubs outside of the Premier League in particular it has a much bigger impact. That being said if you judge sponsorship metrics purely based on numbers then poor performances will often result in similar engagement. If anything, mid-table mediocracy is often the worst-case scenario for sponsorship metrics. It also impacts the type of the content you are able to release, as you are always weary of releasing any light-hearted co-branded content during a poor run of form due to how it may be perceived by fans.

Menino Pereira: Yes, it does. As a club, we often have to delay or pull the plug on certain sponsor campaigns if the team is not

“It is always necessary to see the glass as half full, even in situations that are uncomfortable at the outset.”



Nuno Bernardes Pombo
Research Manager
Sporting Clube de Portugal

doing well to avoid backlash/appearing to be tone deaf. Sentiment tracking on social is key and we try to mitigate any negative equity being transferred over to our partners courtesy of performances on the pitch. On the flipside, we've seen positive

“Football is an old school sport that needs to be updated to a more modern reality in terms of consumption patterns.”



Panagiotis Aroniadis
New Media Director
PAOK

comments on a recent partnership announcement which tied into our unbeaten pre-season run.

Nuno Bernardes Pombo: As a general rule, yes, there is a positive correlation between the team's performance on the field and the impact of activations. Naturally, after a victory or a positive result, the propensity to have more interactions, content views and return is greater. It is a fact and it is documented in our reports. Naturally, we want a strong Club with positive results in the field to pull and attract activations of solid brands in the national and international market. However, I would say that there is always room for a more holistic and variable perspective in some situations. For that, a lot depends on the primary objective of the sponsoring brand. If the brand's basic challenge is to obtain Visibility to increase its levels of notoriety, sometimes a totally unexpected negative result, leads to many interactions with the content of the event that exceeds the value expected for that meeting and that ends up having a much greater appreciation disruptive and higher than initially anticipated. Therefore, it is always necessary to see the glass as half full, even in situations that are uncomfortable at the outset – there is no such thing as bad publicity.

“Better sporting performance translates in higher reach, especially among users who are loosely connected to the club.”

Alexander Mühl

Director Marketing & Digitization
Borussia Dortmund



Do you think football clubs/sports teams should adapt to make themselves more attractive to prospective sponsors? In what ways do you think teams can adapt?

Fraser Read: Off the pitch, I believe that all sports organisations should be looking to make themselves an attractive prospect to sponsors. However, this must be done by being authentic to your club values rather than bending purely for financial gain. Supporters will soon see through partnerships that are run on a solely commercial basis and alignment is a really important part of any successful partnership.

Alexander Mühl: Establish more personalized communication towards fans and offer more targeted access to their fanbase (i.e. in CRM oder owned channels).

Panagiotis Aroniadis: For sure. Football clubs should generally adapt to new trends and practices. Football is an old school

sport that needs to be updated to a more modern reality in terms of consumption patterns. You need to adapt your content & digital strategy to be closer to the fans and their habits. You have to serve them and create the best possible content for them. If you do this, then sponsors will follow. Quality is the key for that and adaptation is vital in football.

Brittany Arner: A brand identity doesn't change, but being creative and flexible to offer a unique package/asset goes a long way in boosting relationships and testing out different markets/demos.

Jamie Thomas: They can adapt to a certain degree, but its also important to balance the desire to appeal to new markets, with the club's brand identity and values which have been established over their history. The make up of the squad and how many nationalities are represented, as well as any other language social media accounts broaden the effectiveness of communicating with a wide variety of markets and territories. On top of this clubs who have a clear societal cause they are looking to champion and lead the way on can appeal to a narrower spectrum of brands but more powerfully. An example that springs to mind is Forest Green Rovers and their efforts to be the most environmentally friendly football club. They have a clear niche that sponsors who share this passion will want to partner with more than potentially 'bigger' clubs.

Menino Pereira: I believe that the adaptation has already been made and that it has gone through a lot of digital media. The pandemic came to accelerate this process

in a very transcendent way, which was already on-going pre-pandemic. However, the change was being driven by the Clubs. There was still some resistance on the part of some sponsors who preferred traditional supports (activation of supports in the Stadium, on jerseys, advertising panels, etc.). It should be noted that the transformation was not limited only to larger clubs. Everyone had to accelerate the transition to

“Supporters will soon see through partnerships that are run on a solely commercial basis and alignment is a really important part of any successful partnership.”



Fraser Read

Head of Marketing
Blackburn Rovers

digital. It was the only way out for months, for everyone involved. We have seen and continue to see increasingly disruptive, creative and meaningful digital activations. We observe that there are more and more professionals in the Digital MKT area working in the associated departments and that there is more budget allocated for this.

However, there are still growing pains.

At the level of competition organizers, it is urgently necessary to unite the Clubs in a more peaceful communication. We have excellent players on the pitch, brilliant coaches and technical teams on the bench, great professionals in the business segment in the office, but even so, we continue to have guerrilla communication and little fair play that keeps more and more

“At the level of competition organizers, it is urgently necessary to unite the Clubs in a more peaceful communication.”

Menino Pereira

Partnerships Research
& Insights Lead
Arsenal



football fans away, which consequently removes the attractiveness of sponsorships. Digital channels associated with Sport and Football continue to be a great means of activation, however, we must not neglect these issues, in order to maintain the attractiveness of both those who watch and those who invest.

It is necessary to regulate the metrics and methodology of valuation in digital (outside it too). This point is very sensitive to us, as we have several sponsors who are also partners with other clubs and sometimes for similar activations, they have very different return numbers, as the methodology applied is different. We are comfortable because we work with the best in the market and we know that if the methodology is regulated, we will hardly be harmed, on the contrary, it will further solidify the current reports that we share with our sponsors' brands.

Training and regulation on the part of the stakeholders (Uefa, Liga, FPF) is necessary for the entry and activation of sponsorships from the NFTS and FAN TOKENS market.

Who do you feel does digital activations best in the industry?

Fraser Read: There are some great examples throughout the industry, I couldn't pick just one but Manchester City, England and AFC Bournemouth do some really clever campaigns across their platforms. Outside of the UK and football, the NFL and NBA activations really push the boundaries and tend to set the pace for digital content.

Alexander Mühl: I really don't see a clear pattern towards a clear industry leader.

Panagiotis Aroniadis: Sports apparel and gaming companies. The campaigns that Nike or Adidas or EA or these types of brands create can be treated like case studies. Fortunately big clubs and leagues are

“Clubs who have a clear societal cause they are looking to champion and lead the way on can appeal to a narrower spectrum of brands but more powerfully.”



Jamie Thomas

Marketing Manager
Hull City FC

following but there are many things that should be done better. Especially it countries out of the Top 5 leagues in Europe.

Brittany Arner: I do like the AR/VR applications that the NFL use during games. It's very easy to incorporate sponsorship on VR giveaways and contests.

Jamie Thomas: Within the football industry I think Man City, Arsenal and Liverpool do a particularly good job, but more broadly in sport Formula 1 have made great strides in recent years.

Menino Pereira: I think there are a few: Man City, Borussia Dortmund, AC Milan, Australian Open tennis, Olympics.

Nuno Bernardes Pombo: In Digital Research Activation (Market Studies) I would go for Manchester United. Considering best brand sport sponsoring I would name Red Bull and honorable mention to Rakuten who have done an amazing job in various sports. ■

CAN A MULTINATIONAL LEAGUE BE THE FUTURE OF FOOTBALL?

FBIN's Quang T. Pham speaks with Maksim Krivunecs, Executive Chairman of the Latvian Virsliga about the vision of a Baltic League.

By Quang T. Pham

Is the European Super League a multinational league?

Krivunecs firmly believes that the European Super League (ESL) is not quite the same as the multinational league concept. The ESL does not include different nations at core but having big clubs from different markets. Frankly speaking, its focus is on the markets, not the nations and that's a very important distinction. Though the argument for the ESL seems very understand-

able, this kind of project will influence the whole football system in a negative way. ESL will disrupt the market in all 55 UEFA countries since all stakeholders will invest in it, leaving less for everyone else. This is why this project is being considered at the European Union and the Court of Justice level. It is crucial to get a final judgment on this project since it may be the second most dramatic and significant case after Bossman.

The gap between big and small clubs/leagues in football

Krivunecs stated that the UEFA's existing model has been sustainable to certain degrees. Obviously, many issues need to be fixed, especially narrowing the gap between big vs. small leagues/clubs or even the gap between clubs within the same league. There are many strategies to deal with it, but not all are applicable. For example, the American salary cap has been hotly debated for quite some time, but apparently, it would not work in the European Sports system. Still, Krivunecs believes winning the legal case and keeping the current model for medium and small leagues is the first crucial step because all the leagues are getting money from UEFA for the youth system development and infrastructure projects. So, it is interesting

to see what the (court) decision will be because whoever is the regulator is also the competition manager, and that is what the ESL wants to prove to the court there is a conflict of interests.

Why multinational leagues?

The answer is in resources. In order to compete, leagues and clubs need resources. Still, small and medium leagues with limited resources can hardly keep up with bigger leagues. It is the same in business, where bigger companies will have more opportunities and instruments to grow. Let's take Latvia as an example; having a small market with just only 2 million people with an economy is still in the development stage. Latvia needs more resources to develop the whole football system and club members. Krivunecs and his colleagues learned from history, the likes of the Scandinavian or Benelux leagues, to first increase the market size and create a favorable investment climate to bring more revenues.

Why is a multinational League perfect for the Baltic region?

Within the UEFA, only the Baltic countries are in the best situation for a pilot project. First, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania share many economic, historical, social,

and cultural similarities. These countries share the same history and have no borders as EU countries. They also have many economic similarities, such as GDP, purchasing power, and market sizes. Hence, it's less challenging to integrate and avoid many conflicting points. Second, all three leagues have the same competition levels; in other words, the top sides from each country have an equal chance and increase the competitiveness balance. There is also synergy in the competition format, especially the balance of competition fairness and element of luck.

Common challenges when organizing a multinational league

Krivunecs shared from his own experience the most common challenges when managing the Baltic League:

Access to UEFA competition

The multinational league might affect the available slots for the UEFA competitions. For example, 3 Champion League spots and nine Conference League spots may go down to 1 Champion League spot and three Conference League spots. Most teams want to compete in UEFA tournaments for pride and TV rights money, so this is the big question.

Infrastructure quality

To ensure consistent infrastructure quality, the common league needs to gain bigger interest from municipalities and the government to develop facilities such as stadiums.

Competition Calendar

Although all three countries have summer leagues, some differences still need to be negotiated because it affects each team's pre-season preparation.

Harmonization of regulations

Each country's tournament has different rules, such as foreign player policy, so the negotiation between all stakeholders requires much more work and patience.

Operational and Management system

The question is how to combine the boards from three leagues/federations and how to create the management structure for the common league. The Baltic League has agreed on the league competition and cup tournament formats.

Loss of national football traditions

The multinational league, might take away some local values like historic rivalries or derbies. Still, the multinational league is a great opportunity to create new regional rivalries or traditions.

Can a multinational league be the future of football?

Krivunecs stated that it is definitely possible but needs a good case study as a proof of concept, and the Baltic region is the only place within UEFA that can deploy this pilot project. He firmly believes that a multinational league is an impactful approach to reducing the gap between small and big leagues. Furthermore, this concept will attract more investment interest from governments and private organizations to create football nations. ■

"If we don't do this (multinational league), all three Baltic countries will remain at the same pace and will probably never play at the Euros or World Cup."

Maksims Krivunecs



OVERVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL CLUB MANAGEMENT

With an expertise of over a decade in the sector, discussing with c-levels across the continents and visiting over 200 clubs we have a deep passion for football. We are happy to offer the readers of FBin a quick&go series offering a 360 degrees overview of #clubmanagement football.

By Konstantin Kornakov, LTT Sports

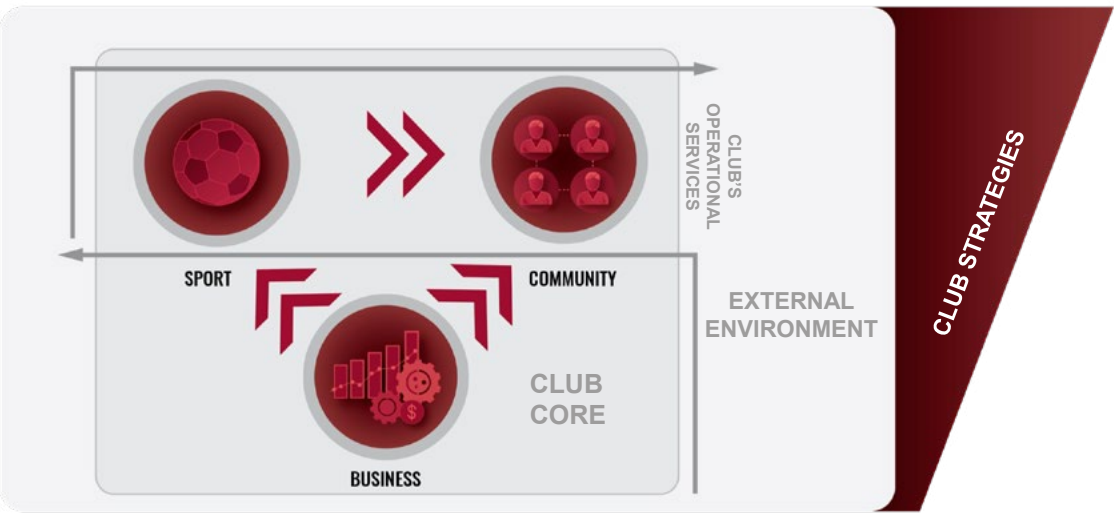
According to FIFA statistics, there are more than 300,000 football clubs (amateur and professional) in the world, and slightly over 100,000 professional football players globally. If we conservatively estimate that a professional club has 25 professional players, that means that in the world there are at least 4,000 professional clubs, of which the majority are physically located in Europe. UEFA's annual club licensing report talks of around 750 clubs on the continent playing in the various top national divisions from Albania to Wales.

On one hand, it does seem like a very large number, but on the other, if compared with

the number of private businesses or even specific organisations like cinemas, it is rather small, and, as with any small samples in statistics, not very apt for generalisations.

All this means that it is very difficult to talk about standard approaches in anything to do with football clubs and their organisation. Of course, clubs may be similar in that they all have the same general functions (football team and backroom staff, specific infrastructure), but there are many organisational models used that are down to domestic or international legal requirements, traditions or ownership decisions, and

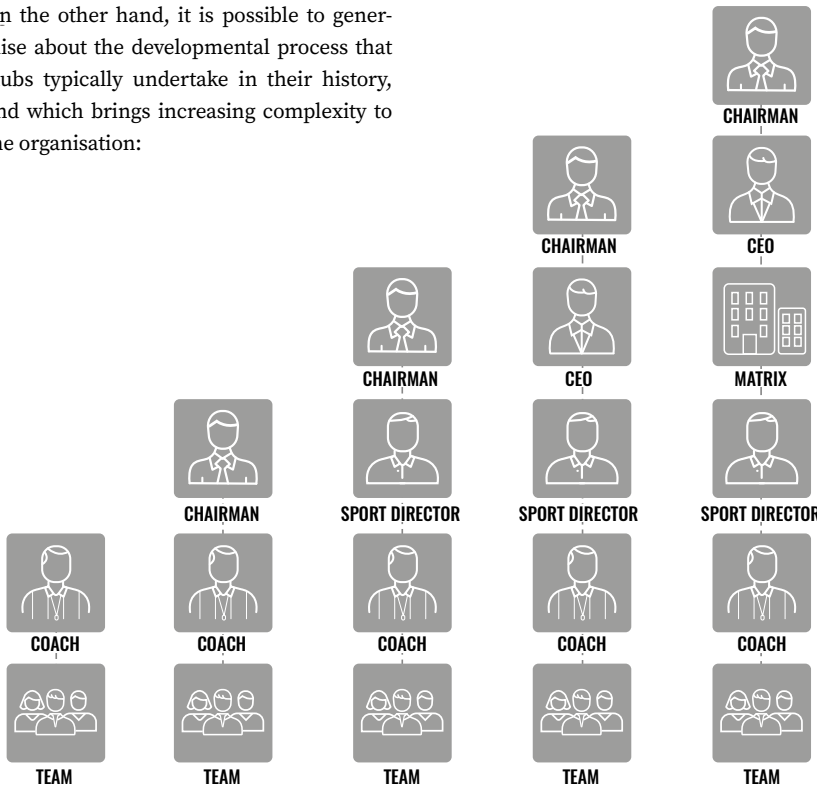
which may include different approaches to leadership, decision making or operations. Some common themes for clubs are the position of the football department in relation to the overall structure, as well as the decision-making process in respect of football matters. Very schematically, it is possible to talk about football clubs being built on three pillars of sport, business and community, with an internal operational environment around them, a further external environment and an important strategy function that gives sense and direction to the way the organisation develops in the medium to long-term:



Inspired by the ECA Club Management Guide, Jarosz O, Kornakov K, Söderman S

Another consideration must be that most professional football clubs in Europe are relatively old establishments: for example, in the English Premier League all the clubs playing in season 2022/23 are more than 100 years old. Even if you take countries with a less-developed football tradition, clubs in the top division will tend to be quite old compared to the average age of businesses there. All of this gives clubs their uniqueness, through the weight of history and the layers of governance that each individual club has gone through over the years.

On the other hand, it is possible to generalise about the developmental process that clubs typically undertake in their history, and which brings increasing complexity to the organisation:



Inspired by the ECA Club Management Guide, Jarosz O, Kornakov K, Söderman S

LTT Sports is an independent advisory group focused on connecting football strategy and operations based on experience, analysis and a strong network. By providing transversal solutions at all levels of the professional football pyramid, we help our partners boost performance and results on and off the pitch.

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SOFTWARE-SUPPORTED CONTROLLING OF FOOTBALL SPONSORSHIPS – RATIONAL OR JUST NICE TO DO?

By Thorsten Dum, Axel Sierau & Max Jung

The digital transformation of football companies is progressing rapidly. Countless software tools in the areas of player performance, arena management, fan management or business productivity testify to the fact that software-supported specialisation, for the effective control of the respective football-specific services, does not stop at football management. Especially on the part of the football clubs, the various available tools are used to improve player performance. Visual, sensory, or combinatorial methods are used in equal measure. Software can also be used to understand football customers even better and address them more precisely, for example via CRM systems. Marketing potential in the area of sponsoring can also be explored more easily via systemic support. Football clubs have understood that they need to use software-based measures to work more effectively. The IT they use influences business models or enables important business pro-

cesses, thus making a significant contribution to the value chain.

Although football clubs have been using software-based methods for some time, it is even more surprising that little is known about IT systems for managing sponsorships, and particularly on the sponsor side. Sponsors are always on the lookout for marketing opportunities, typically receive numerous sponsorship propositions daily, must justify their budgets, and possibly demonstrate the success of the sponsorship in terms of impact.

Every day, sponsorship managers receive numerous sponsorship and donation requests from rights holders. They must be processed, checked, and evaluated according to the communication objectives of the respective sponsor. Sponsorship requests from public, private or interest groups continue to increase and thus entail an ever-in-

creasing effort for sponsors. Sponsorship proposals are forwarded to sponsorship managers through a variety of channels such as sales, switchboard, or staff. The structured overview of the existing portfolio, or the portfolio to be planned, can quickly be lost, making smooth management difficult.

Furthermore, the holistic measurability of the impact of sponsorships remains an academic issue, due to the interdisciplinary orientation of the communication instrument with its manifold objectives. Impact levels of sponsorships could possibly be better represented and targeted by the appropriate software tools.

An example: The sponsor's brand always appears in connection with the sponsored event or organisation. This may cause a desired image transfer from the sponsored organisation to the sponsor's own brand.

Could this effect be better controlled by software tools?

Ultimately, it is a question of the sponsoring organisation itself. Does it trust experienced sponsoring managers with an implicit wealth of experience, does it rely exclusively on analytical/methodological software tools, or does it pursue a combination of them? It is therefore a question of the philosophy of the sponsoring organisation, and of course, a question of willingness to invest in new software technologies. At the very least, one can assume that working without a software tool involves more operational effort. Therefore, the control of sponsorships on the part of the rights holders has become an important task that is possibly easier to achieve with software support, rather than through manual checking. But how can this be achieved? What possibilities does the market offer? Below, we present and consider one selected sponsorship software for companies.

There are a fair number of quite different software tools on the market for managing sponsorship engagements. One important software tool is the Performind platform from Sponsorium. It describes itself as the world's leading sponsorship management platform. With this software, the current sponsorship portfolio can be managed automatically, and financial data can be recorded in an orderly manner. In addition, one's own portfolio can be evaluated on the basis of self-set goals and KPIs, and new sponsorship requests can be assessed and selected, thus optimising existing partnerships and more effectively achieving one's own corporate goals. This data can also be reported in real time at any point in time, and used for internal and external negotiations.

Performind offers numerous templates, practical examples, expert reports and unlimited support, also automating manual processes within the company. With the help of a structured 6-step programme, it aims to facilitate the sponsors' sponsorship workflow.

First, you are asked to create an updated score card. This is done with the help of

experts who are always available and wish to determine together with the client, what is most important to him. The information gathered can then be used to correctly create an individually weighted online questionnaire that can help the sponsor evaluate existing partnerships and new offers.

The next step is to consolidate all the data from your active partnerships in one place. This means that all data is stored in one location and processed in a safe and orderly manner. In the process, all existing partnerships are integrated into the software platform. This has the advantage that all ongoing projects can be accessed at any time via the real-time dashboard.

It is therefore now possible to analyse and evaluate one's portfolio. With the help of the software, it is possible to determine which partnerships are in line with the company's goals and which can be improved. This feature makes it easier to distinguish between successful and less popular collaborations.

The enquiry process is similar. When new enquiries come in, the weighted criteria are used to check which offers are the most suitable. Afterwards, it is easy to view and rate the progress. To show the success of the activities, individual reports can be created, and the budget can be tracked. The company can thus add value to its portfolio and work, and manage the processes effectively.

The main benefits are internal communication and an optimised and centralised bidding process with automated allocations. Also to be considered are the budget management and allocation to the business units, with respect to the portfolio and its exact objectives. Data needs to be centralised and requests are channelled, so that everything runs through one line.

It can be assumed that the introduction of sponsorship-specific software may involve major barriers. For example, databases might not be compatible with each other, which would complicate the change enormously. In addition, it takes time to train staff and familiarise them with the new sponsorship controlling method. Valuable

working time is lost as a result. Sponsoring companies must therefore weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of specific software.

The question is which software is the right one for them, and how they should integrate and introduce the sponsorship-specific software into the company.

“Although football clubs have been using software-based methods for some time, it is even more surprising that little is known about IT systems for managing sponsorships, and particular on the sponsor side.”

“Best of Breed”

Unlike the complete solution, where one can rely on a single provider for all business areas, the work is in fact conducted with many different providers. The various individual applications can be combined with each other, resulting in an integrated, functioning system landscape.

With the “All in One” method, the company's entire software is purchased from the same supplier, and all systems are compatible with each other. This has the advantage that there are no problems with interfaces or issues with different user interfaces. This is also referred to as complete solutions, which are designed in such a way that they can depict as many relevant business areas and processes of a company as possible in one system. Ideally, such a complete solution consists of a process-accompanying ERP, CRM and DMS system that considers the specific needs of sponsoring activities. ■



RELEVANCE OF AND LEGAL CHALLENGES FOR NFTs IN SPORTS

By Matthias Greulich, LL.M.



On 17 Mai 2022 the DFL Deutsche Fußball Liga GmbH announced a record result for the awarding of license rights for stickers and trading cards including NFTs. According to the DFL's press statement, German professional football clubs can insofar expect a record income in excess of 170 million Euros for the upcoming licensing period. In comparison to the current licensing period, the revenue for the awarding of said license rights is thus increased by approximately 280 %. Licensees are market leading Sorare, Topps and OneFootball.

A substantial contribution to the growth of revenue are non-fungible tokens (NFTs). NFTs are a method of providing files with a digital signature. This technology is based on the blockchain, a decentralized database that often allows to program so

called Smart Contracts. Among other aspects, Smart Contracts are used to connect a (digital) reference object with the NFT in a forgery-proof manner. NFTs prove that the (digital) reference object is authenticated respectively a not-counterfeit and can therefore serve as a certificate of authenticity and legal ownership.

Relevance of NFTs in Sports

NFTs offer numerous new marketing opportunities in sports, for example by tagging (digital) collectable images, videos, and the like. Ticket sales can also benefit from the technology by avoiding counterfeiting and thus slowing down the black market. The blockchain increases counterfeit protection both when an NFT is issued

and when it is transferred. It is therefore no coincidence that the market for NFTs is booming worldwide. Pioneer is certainly the NBA, which, for example, turned over half a billion US dollars in 2021 with the production and distribution of NFT-tagged video clips via the "NBA Top Shot" platform.

Legal Challenges for NFTs

When discussing legal challenges, it is advisable to distinguish between the rights to the NFT itself and the rights to the (digital) reference object linked to the respective NFT. In relation to any rights to the NFT itself, it is to be noted that there are not clearly clarified by law. In particular, due to the lack of physicality of an NFT, it is dis-

puted whether legal ownership of it can be acquired. The market therefore currently thrives on the exchange of a legal position that is not conclusively regulated. The intellectual property rights underlying the (digital) reference object are clearly assigned to and remain with the respective rights holders when the NFT is created. The holder, however, can grant rights of use of the (digital) reference object.

At the same time, two basic models are conceivable with regard to marketing "NFT products" (NFT plus reference object) for the owners of the intellectual property rights underlying the (digital) reference object: On the one hand, the rights holder can bring the NFTs to the market itself; on the other hand, the rights holder can also enter into a licensing agreement with a licensee who will take over the process of creating and commercializing the NFTs. However, the process of creating and commercializing NFTs is so complex that independent implementation is usually hardly possible for rights holders. Against this background, the rights holders will usually license the intellectual property rights underlying the (digital) reference object. As long as any rights to the NFT itself are not clearly clarified by law, this offers the stakeholders, being here the licensor (leagues, clubs, players, and the like) and the licensee (entity creating and commercializing the products), also the chance to preserve the value of the corresponding "NFT products".

Least standards of the stakeholder's cooperation

In the event that rights holders decide to work with licensees who take over the process of creating and marketing "NFT prod-

ucts" any agreements should consider several legal and commercial aspects, at least. The best possible protection of the owner's rights can only be ensured if misuse of the (digital) reference product is prevented as far as possible. Such misuse can loom in a variety of ways: For example, an end user who has purchased an NFT with a video sequence could distribute this video on the Internet for commercial purposes without authorization. Rights owners should therefore pay detailed attention to the contractual protection of their rights in relation to the licensee and the end users. A sufficient contractual agreement will at the same time protect the licensees, who earn money from the stable value when "NFT products" are being (re-)sold.

The first prerequisite for cooperation is that the licensor grants the licensee the necessary license rights to the (digital) reference product. Depending on the individual case, these may be trademark rights, copyrights, or personality rights. The license should be limited as far as possible to the creation and commercialization of the "NFT product".

Second, the rights holder and the licensee should agree that when marketing the "NFT product", the licensee must guarantee in relation to the licensor that all purchasers of the "NFT products" accept certain restrictions on their rights of use to be determined by the licensee. The aim of such a provision is to ensure that in the event of misuse of the (digital) reference products by the purchasers, the rights holder has indirect contractual control over them. In addition, it might also be agreed upon that the licensee must independently enforce his own contractual claims against end users who misuse the protected (digital) reference products at the request of the

rights holder and/or assign such claims to the rights holder having then direct claims against the purchaser.

Continued commercial interest for rights' holder

Apart from these standards, it is also advisable for rights owners and licensees to agree on a revenue share, in addition to or possibly even instead of the agreement of a lump-sum license fee. Due to the volatility of the still very young market, the performance of the "NFT products" is difficult to predict. Hereby, an appropriate consideration of the economic interests of both the rights holder and the licensee regarding the initial, as well as secondary market sales can be achieved.

Conclusion

The hype around NFTs will certainly continue. NFTs offer unique opportunities for the commercialization of new products and the forgery-proof exchange of existing goods and services. As long as the legal framework is not further defined by the legislator, all stakeholders should rely on sufficient contractual agreements. In this regard, the protection of intellectual property rights to the (digital) reference products and an appropriate economic consideration of all interests are the minimum standard to meet the given legal challenges. ■

About the author:

Matthias Greulich, LL.M., is Associate Lawyer at Hoffmann Liebs and advises all stakeholders (clubs, companies, players) primarily in Intellectual Property Law and Competition Law.

THE FIRST PUBLICLY TRADED SPANISH CLUB

In this article, FBIN spoke to Tomás Moya, Head of Communication at CF Intercity - the first publicly-traded football club in Spain, on its recent development.

By Quang T. Pham



Founded in 2017, CF Intercity is a fairly young football club. Could you briefly tell us the recent developments of the clubs?

In 2015, the idea of establishing a new football club in the province of Alicante with completely disruptive sports and economic management was born. Two years later, with the acquisition of the GCD Sant Joan, a First Regional Autonomic squad from the province of Alicante, the CF Intercity was established.

The core idea was to create a football club run as a company, breaking away from the traditional model of Spanish sports clubs. In the 2017-18 season, CF Intercity was promoted from Primera Regional Preferente to Regional Preferente and, just one season later, to Tercera División.

In 2020, we got promoted to the Second Division of the Royal Spanish Football Federation, a division in which we are in leading positions.

The most significant milestone in our history occurred on October 29, 2021, when the club announced its IPO and became the first Spanish team to operate under the BME Growth.

The last stage in this advancement was the merger with Lucentum Alicante (the basketball team of the city of Alicante), revealing the ambition to become a national sports powerhouse.

FC Intercity is the first publicly traded Spanish club and thriving to become a sports joint-stock company (SAD). What is the key motivation for this?

We have always pursued innovation and undertaken innovative projects. We have all seen numerous football teams fall into irrecoverable debt and even collapse due to a lack of financial expertise and resources. It is time to explore other paths and different financing modes in the world of football.

The club wants to be recognized as a sports school worldwide. Could you elaborate on what this means?

For CF Intercity, it is essential and unquestionable to have a sports school with educational and social projects that reinforce the value of the company and contribute to the development of our society.

Which revenue stream is the most important right now?

Similar to most football clubs, traditional income sources like ticketing or merchandising are essential for us. Still, we distinguish ourselves by being the first team to go IPO and by having the exclusive ability to approach the thousands of shareholders who have faith in our project. The contributions of all stakeholders to capital raise are our primary source of revenue.

What are CF Intercity's current high-priority projects?

First, we want to grow our management structure, professionalize the club's operations, and transform it into a multi-sport organization. Specifically, we will cover a variety of sports, integrating and promot-

ing those currently underrepresented in the Spanish sports landscape.

Second, we are aware of the significance of having our facilities and companies connected with sports activity. We want to develop the best infrastructures for the practice of sport, promoting base sports and training in the many modalities our sports group covers.

How do you see the club's development in the next five years?

The business model is very clear: to reach breakeven point, and to reach professional football where football clubs begin to have profitability. To realize this goal, we have devised the following financial strategy: conduct capital increases to obtain sufficient recurring resources and maintain one of the best budgets in the category, opting for promotion each season.

The club aims to be self-sufficient, which will only be possible with promotion to the Second Division. Until then, we must finance ourselves in the capital market and get ambitious budgets to achieve promotions. ■



Tomás Moya Head of Communication, CF Intercity

"We have all seen numerous football teams fall into irrecoverable debt and even collapse due to a lack of financial expertise and resources. It is time to explore other paths and different financing modes in the world of football."

Tomás Moya

FRANK VAN EIJSDEN ON TYMES4 AND THE FUTURE OF TICKETING

Frank van Eijdsen is COO of Tymes4, a member of the FBIN Business Network. In this interview he speaks about his company, how it developed, the biggest issues and the future of ticketing.

By Thomas Maurer



You are provider of a ticketing solution. What is the special thing of Tymes4?

Most ticketing solutions out there are what we call legacy systems. They were developed years and years ago for ticketing in its widest form (for events, theatre, sports etc.) and do not meet modern day criteria. Today professional football organizations want to have ticketing integrated in their (complex) eco-system and require a state of the art, brilliant looking front-end. With this in mind we developed Tymes4. Specifically for professional football organizations, as we think football ticketing is so much different then ticketing for an event of theatre show.

With Tymes4 we focus on 4 things:

1. Help organizations grow fan engagement
2. Generate revenue
3. Bring efficiency (save costs) and last but not least:
4. Data!

With it's our open, data-first architecture Tymes4 integrates and interacts with the football eco-system. Whether it's SSO, an accounting system, datawarehouse or CRM, Tymes4 connects the ticketing dots.

Why did your clients choose to work with you? Mainly because of our focus on football, the football ticketing expertise we have and all of that combined with our technology. We've had 10 clubs choosing for Tymes4 in the last year alone!

The Belgian FA, like you a member of the FBIN Network, is a client. Who else are you working with?

As we're quite a new kid on the block (on the market for 3 years), being a Holland based company, our primarily focus was the Dutch market. Starting with Feyenoord Rotterdam, the second largest football club in the Netherlands, we now work for half the Eredivisie. For teams such as FC Utrecht, FC Twente, Vitesse etc. And while we're still counting, we are now focussing on international expansion.

Tymes4 was developed by a professional football club. Can you tell us a bit more about the founding and development process?

Well, it wasn't developed by a football club, it's developed with the input of a club. Feyenoord Rotterdam, likely the most demanding club in The Netherlands, were done with ticketing always being the department slowing digitalization projects down. Done with the (grounded) complaints of fans about usability and a lack of functionality in the ticketshop. We (Ormer ICT) already worked for Feyenoord (supplying managed IT services) and we got the chance to co-develop a ticketing platform from scratch. Feyenoord the functional input, Ormer ICT the technical solution. That worked out well, as we're now on the market (selling to other clubs) for 3 years and recently managed to become market leader in the Netherlands (we work for 14 Dutch clubs).

Is Tymes4 working for every organisation, every size?

Yes, it does. Although not every organization is the same, due to our modular

approach we have managed to develop Tymes4 in a way it fits all needs. Most of the times the difference is in the level of differentiating things and the use (y/n) of certain functionalities and modules. So in the end everything relates to the level of inhouse ticketing expertise an organization has. Therefore, we have hired multiple seasoned consultant (together over 50 years football ticketing experience), with a background at Ajax, AZ, Feyenoord and KNVB (Dutch football association), helping our clients getting the most out of their ticketing.

You are constantly developing Tymes4. What are you working on, are there any new features coming up?

True, we have a dedicated development team inhouse (and a flexible extended team) and are continuously developing new features and functionality, both roadmap development and custom projects. Currently we're in the latest stage of developing an integrated secondary ticketing module, so fans can resale their single match ticket of season ticket through our platform directly to other fans. And after this release, we've planned to do some refactoring (upgrading to the newest source code) as there's one thing we do not want to become: a legacy system. There's plenty of those.

Basically, what will the future of ticketing in football look like?

One of the things that is happening, is that ticketing is blending more with marketing. Football marketeers continue to know and understand the fan better and use deep (hyper) personalization in their (segmentation for) campaigns to increase conversion. The next step is that ticketing platforms react



Frank van Eijdsen COO, Tymes4

better to that and respond with a personalized flow and a personalized set of rules. We think in the future ticketing platforms will be less visible (move more to the background) and become sort of transaction engines. If you can buy back your seat for an additional cup match, why should you go to the ticketshop to do that whilst just confirming a push message through the app is in the end all it takes.

What are the biggest issues clubs have in ticketing currently? And how do you solve that issue?

In The Netherlands the biggest issue used to be server capacity during peak sales together with order failures (order booked, payment not approved or otherwise). During peak-sales, shops became slow, crashed and sometimes even an onsale of club A led to a slow ticketshop for club B. Therefore, all our clients have their own hosted environment in Microsoft Azure, servers scale automatically and we have a proactive (own) queue. Making sure overload is history. And to prevent order failures (one of a club's worst nightmares) we decided to integrate the payment process more in the primary ticket flow (payment is not just a sidestep at the end) so we were able to implement loads of checks and actions. Hence, zero to none order failures. ■

THE SLOVAK FORTUNA LIGA AND AS TRENCIN JOIN THE FBIN FOOTBALL NETWORK

The FBIN Football Network as platform for the development of football organisations continues to grow. The Slovak League joins the network to add new service offers for their clubs and support their development process. And the Slovak club AS Trencin becomes a full member as well.

The Slovak Fortuna Liga consists of 12 teams playing in the top division in Slovakia. Since 2009, the league is independent from the national association. In 2022 it also became an ordinary member of European Leagues.

Beside the league itself, also one club from Slovakia becomes a full member of the FBIN Football Network, AS Trencin. Trencin is the eleventh club to join the network, besides club members from Australia, Austria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Slovenia, and Switzerland.

AS Trencin is a traditional football club that currently operates in the 1st league. The Trencin football club was founded in 1992 as Ozeta Dukla Trencin and bears the current name AS Trencin (Association of sports) since 2003. The majority owners of the club are Dutch. The club became the champion of Slovakia and Cup winner in

2004/2005 and 2005/2006. In 2019 the new academy was built and currently the new stadium for 10,000 people is being build which is one of the most significant investments in the region.

The Slovak League and FBIN work together to create specific offers to educate and support the professional football clubs in Slovakia, to help them solving current issues and cope with future challenges. Workshops, events, and advisory services are part of this.

“We really look forward to starting the cooperation with FBIN. The cooperation on league level was approved by the ExCo of the league. Our aim is to grow constantly, and we feel that a cooperation with FBIN could be another gamechanger for our clubs. We really feel, that FBIN is representing an ideal partner for our clubs and their employees to address concrete projects

such as the return of fans, matchday experience and more. We definitely look forward to seeing best practices from the clubs in our region, that we can compare with,” says Michal Mertinyák, Executive Director of the Slovak League.

“We are very happy to become part of the FBIN Network. We are part of a certain region with opportunities that are different from big leagues and clubs, so we really appreciate all activities, the network, and the initiatives that a membership brings. It gives us the opportunity to share experiences and knowledge with a very relevant group of clubs, companies, or institutions. Working in the club on marketing is a never-ending process that we must constantly move forward, and this platform brings us a lot of inspiration. We believe that we will be a successful and quality part of it. We look forward to further projects and cooperation,” says Igor Schlesinger, Head of Marketing & Sales at AS Trencin.

“It’s an honour for us that the Slovak Football League chose us as their partner to support the development and evolution of their clubs. And that with AS Trencin a club decided to go all in and become a full member itself additionally. I look forward to working with both organisations and shaping the future of the Slovak club football together,” says Thomas Maurer, Managing Director of FBIN.

Read an interview with Michal Mertinyák, Executive Director of the Slovak League, on our website.



Michal Mertinyák Executive Director, Slovak Fortuna Liga



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The FBIN Football Network is a worldwide community for rights holders in football with 100% focus on off-the-pitch services and offers.

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DIGITALISATION AND TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIPS IN FOOTBALL: AN OVERVIEW IN EUROPE’S TOP 5 LEAGUES

By Bilal Seker, Thorsten Dum & Axel Sierau

In recent years, the variety of sponsorships and their importance for sport clubs and entities have increased significantly. Hardly any football club competes without sponsoring partners associating with their sponsored clubs for several reasons. Such cooperation primarily helps the respective clubs to secure their match operations. Without these highly endowed sponsorship agreements, no football club would be able to pay the necessary exorbitantly high salaries to its players and would thus

not remain competitive in the long term. Particularly in the recent and very uncertain pandemic period, sponsorships were therefore vital for the survival of many clubs.

While it has been standard for decades for gigantic brands from the automotive industry, the banking sector or the airline industry to associate with top football clubs, a new trend in partnerships has been observed in recent years, which extend beyond marketing objectives from the sponsor perspective.

For some time now, it has been possible to observe a trend whereby the provision of digital services / digital infrastructure is at the forefront of strategic alliances in sports generally, and in football specifically. These so-called “digitalisation partnerships” are generally regarded as the building up of “Digital Ecosystems”. This means that the technology company no longer acts as a mere sponsor, but as an equal partner that attempts to promote a market entry strategy for its products by providing innovative tech services and strengthening sales channels in the football-related environment. From the club’s perspective, digital eco systems enable them to provide real-time content in the right context, attract and engage new fans, manage and entertain existing fans, unlock new revenue potential, and make existing business and athletic processes more effective.

Similar to the great rivalries on the football field, there is also intense competition among the big tech companies from USA, Europe and Asia in order to become the preferred technology partner of the big sports federations and football clubs.

As part of this digital transformation process of the clubs, tech enterprises advise the clubs to transfer their entire technical infrastructure to a cloud solution and mostly host the club’s own online platforms and apps. In addition to infrastructure topics, innovative formats, content and live formats are developed and implemented together.

Aside from Video Assisted Referee Systems (VAR), technology is already being used to collect data about football matches and training sessions through various mechanisms including performance analysis software and data from wearable technology providers which aims to measure and improve both player and team performance. In the meantime, video clips of players are fed directly to the trainer’s tablet within a very short timeframe, so that tactics, training sessions and so on, are now all stored in the cloud.

This leads to the question of how football is currently being transformed by innovation and technology, what types of digitalisation partnerships have entered the agenda, and what respective examples have been agreed upon recently, specifically in Europe?

Below are selected examples of technology partnerships that we collected, based on club’s official websites as of August 2022.

One very prominent example is Bundesliga’s 1. FC Köln, which only recently pushed ahead with a strategic digitalisation partnership with Deutsche Telekom, which we briefly introduce below.

Mini-Case: Technology partnership between 1. FC Köln and Deutsche Telekom

Europe’s largest telecommunications provider Deutsche Telekom is 1. FC Köln football club’s exclusive partner for telecommunications, digitalisation and technology. The partnership started in the 2021/22 Bundesliga season, and is planned to continue for at least three years. With this partnership, both parties cooperate in realizing different digital projects. Deutsche Telekom’s assignment at the football club from the Rhine includes the transformation of the club’s entire IT infrastructure to a state-of-the-art solution, the hosting of digital platforms and apps, as well as the creation of innovative content material.

As part of the friendly pre-season “Innovation Game” between 1. FC Köln and Italy’s AC Milan in July 2022, various technologies and solutions were already showcased in

Cologne. The technological highlight was an AI-powered body camera from the start-up company “MindFly”, which enhanced the match experience and gave the fans a completely new perspective on the action. The body cam aims to remove the distance between television viewers at home and the players, by enabling the fan to watch the game from a player’s First-Person Point of View (FPV). For this purpose, the player wears a lightweight body cam vest with a built-in microphone to capture the player’s angle.

In future, both sides plan to work with technologies like augmented or virtual reality to develop a unique fan experience.

Lessons Learned

Our conclusion is that the shift in football sponsorship from traditional marketing partnerships to digital partnerships is relentless and ongoing. For clubs, it means that they can maintain and improve their financial revenue opportunities and leverage technology to produce targeted digital fan experiences. For businesses and sponsoring corporations, it means that the football platform is ideally suited to leverage innovative digital services and products in the sport environment. In the future, we expect more digitalisation partnerships to reach the international football stage both in quantity and quality.

For all clubs, and especially those of the non-TOP-5 leagues, this means that they have to understand the “Digital Ecosystem”. This includes but is not limited to detailed knowledge in:

- Customer service and digital service design (fan interfaces, customer insights, value proposition for fans and customers)
- Business and organizational processes (automation in business, scouting, player performance, etc.)
- Business models (seek and implement digital opportunities)

To build a “Digital Ecosystem”, clubs must address several operational and technical challenges. Among other things, they must be able to assess and evaluate the digital environment, clarify IT governance issues, evaluate innovations and technologies, set investment priorities, and develop frameworks for digital partnerships.

Finally, clubs have to cope with the rather negative connotation of commercialisation/technologisation, which seems to be valued differently in European countries in mutual directions. As the Cologne example in Germany shows, a mixed picture has emerged in the fan bases and among sports fans on social media channels. While the football traditionalists fear further commercialisation/technologisation in the context of football, the proponents appreciate this new form of digital fan experience. ■



League	Club	Technology Partner	Core Areas
Premier League	Manchester City	Cisco	Stadium Connectivity and IT Infrastructure, Fan Engagement
	FC Liverpool	Wasabi, Acronis	Data Management, Cyber Protection
	Tottenham Hotspurs	Hewlett Packard	Stadium Connectivity, IT Networking Infrastructure, Stadium Fan Experience
Primera División	Real Madrid	Cisco	Stadium Connectivity and Security, Stadium Experience, Data Management
	Atlético Madrid	Acronis	IT-Security and Cyber Protection
	FC Barcelona	Spotify	Stadium Fan Experience and Entertainment
Serie A	Inter Milan	Lenovo	Data Management, Player Analysis, Hardware and Software Solutions
	A. S. Roma	Digitalbits	Blockchain-based Fan Engagement
	Juventus FC	Socios	Blockchain-based Fan Engagement
Bundesliga	TSG 1899 Hoffenheim	SAP	Data Management, Player Performance Analysis
	Eintracht Frankfurt	Mastercard	Digital Business Models, Stadium Experience, Mobile Payment
	1. FC Köln	Deutsche Telekom	Stadium Connectivity and IT Infrastructure, Stadium Fan Experience
Ligue 1	Paris Saint-Germain	Orange	Stadium Connectivity and IT Infrastructure, Fan Engagement
	Olympique de Marseille	Orange	Stadium Fan Experience
	Olympique Lyonnais	Orange	Stadium Connectivity and IT Infrastructure, Stadium Fan Experience

UNDERSTANDING THE FANS

Stefan Lavén, CEO of Data Talks, speaks about how a CDP can be a mighty tool for clubs to work with data they gather and monetize it.

By Thomas Maurer

You are offering a Sports CDP. What is that?

A Sports CDP is a platform that allows sports organisations to collect, analyze and act on their data to increase revenue while creating a personalized fan experience. By using a CDP you can collect all of your first-party fan data, including demographic, transactional and behavioral data, and merge it into one overview of your fan base. This is what we call the single supporter view. In addition to that, the platform allows you to segment your fan base into groups of fans that share the same characteristics, preferences and behaviours.

Simply put, you'll be able to understand who your most engaged and loyal fans are but also who your less engaged fans are. In other words, those that aren't buying from you. With these insights, you can start tailoring your communication and marketing strategy to make sure you personalize each fan's experience.

Why is it important for sports organisations to work with a CDP?

There are several reasons why a sports organisation should work with a Sports CDP. It's a solution that allows you to adopt a strategy that is highly profitable as well as it is sustainable. Basically, you'll be able to leverage and optimize current revenue streams and uncover new revenue streams while delivering a world-class experience to your fans.

Now, more than ever, It's especially important to start leveraging fan data. The existing shift towards a digital fan experience accelerated drastically as covid-19 cleared out stadiums across the globe. This shift has

fundamentally changed the sports industry as a whole, and the football industry is no exception. One asset that can help both sports organisations to overcome the challenge of giving their fans the experience they want as well as increasing their revenue is leveraging their fan data.

So, whether your objective is to increase your ticket sales, your merchandise revenue, attract larger high-value sponsorship deals or maximizing your matchday revenue, the CDP allows you to reach those goals by making sure you can effectively understand your supporters and target them.

Usually football organisations would ask – what's in it for us financially. So... what's in it for them?

Monetizing fan data can generate significant revenue for clubs, leagues and federations. As I already mentioned, they can use it to target fans directly to increase ticket sales, merchandise sales and matchday revenue. Another financial incentive is being able to provide better and more concrete value to potential sponsors. We have seen really good results in this case as well, and it's a huge financial benefit for football organizations.

Do you have concrete examples, success stories?

I thought you'd never ask. We have seen incredible success from our customers in a very short period. For instance, one of Sweden's biggest football clubs, AIK generated six figure revenue from a single marketing campaign. Their goal was to get as many of their supporters as possible to buy a season ticket. What did they do? They

prioritised having a 360-degree view of each of their supporters by using a Sports CDP and then they divided their supporters into three segments and began to send personalized emails to each supporter segment. This campaign resulted in more than €600,000 generated from a campaign targeting only about 2% of their entire supporter database. And all of this was created in the space of two weeks.

Another example is Greek football club PAOK FC. They could have simply relied on their success on the field to continue boosting their merchandise sales, but they didn't. PAOK understood that there is only so much momentum you can maintain from one event – even if that event is the best thing to ever happen. Knowing this, they decided to take advantage of an upcoming Black Friday with a “Black and White Friday” sales campaign. PAOK saw a merchandise sales increase of 141%, compared to their previ-

ous record by having a Black (&White) Friday campaign.

You are working for clubs of different sizes, does a CDP make sense for every organisation?

Absolutely. Regardless of your size, working with fan data to generate revenue and improve fan experience, is something that should be a priority. The use cases of a Sports CDP are many, so depending on your size and the goals you're trying to achieve, there will be use cases that fit you and your club. For smaller clubs it could be for instance to have relevant, personalized and automated communication with their supporters, and targeted campaigns to maximize matchday revenue. For larger, more digitally mature clubs, the objective might be to apply a RFM (Recency-Frequency-Monetary) analysis to discover different engagement levels in their fan base.

Regardless of your goals, a CDP will make it easy for you to work with your fan data on an everyday basis.

What is a CDP currently capable of and how will that develop in the future?

The CDP is ever-evolving to make sure our sports organisations can work with data in an effective way. One capability is of course for you to gain an actionable understanding of your fans. Meaning, that you can act on those insights to create revenue for your organisation. Other core capabilities include plug & play integrations with major ticketing and e-commerce providers (Ticketmaster, AXS, Seatgeek, Magento, Shopify etc) so getting started is easy, understanding both known and unknown fans (on aggregated level), the ability to flexibly segment your data in the way you want to understand your fans, out of the box dashboards for major sports business areas (ticketing,

merchandise, OTT, membership etc). Going forward, the CDP will evolve to continue to support sports organisations in becoming more data-driven and finding ways to create revenue based on what their data is telling them. ■



Stefan Lavén CEO, Data Talks



The Toumba Stadium of PAOK FC, filled with nearly 29.000 fans.

FBIN NETWORK

Ferencváros

Ferencváros is the most popular multi-sport club of Hungary with 2 million+ domestic supporters. Ferencváros intends to become a well-known and well-respected sport brand in the Central European region, as its popularity grows beyond borders.



www.fradi.hu
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TISA Group

TISA is a technology partner dedicated to helping clubs, leagues and sports organisations innovate and thrive in today's digital world. With over 20 years of experience in the sports industry, we know how to power modern sports business.



www.tisagroup.ch
office@tisagroup.ch
+41 78 818 84 24

Sponsoris

Sponsoris develops theory-based solutions for practical challenges of sports clubs and sponsoring companies and has expertise and methodological knowledge in sports management. This is applied in a solution-oriented and targeted manner.



www.sponsoris.eu
mail@sponsoris.eu

OFI Crete F.C.

OFI Crete F.C., short for Omilos Filathlon Irakliou, is a professional football club, based in Iraklion, Crete. The club was originally founded in 1925. OFI Crete F.C. currently plays in Super League, the top league in Greece.



www.oficretefc.com
press@oficretefc.com

Crowdmanager

Crowdmanager.io is the Fan Engagement and Fan Data Management platform that brings fans closer to sports brands. With more than 150 clubs, leagues and federations we engage, and reward millions of fans across the world.



www.crowdmanager.io
hello@crowdmanager.io
+47 400 21190

Royal Belgian Football Association

The Royal Belgian Football Association, RBFA for short, was founded in 1895 and currently includes over 1,800 clubs and has around 450,000 members. Since 2021, the association has been based in the newly built headquarters in Tubize.



www.rbfa.be
report@rbfa.be
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Hoffmann Liebs

Hoffmann Liebs is a transregional commercial law firm from Düsseldorf with around 60 lawyers. We advise companies, associations and foundations as well as the public sector.



www.hoffmannliebs.de
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LASK

LASK is an Austrian club with a long-standing history. After an era of ups and downs, the club is on an upwards trajectory since 2013 and has reached the UEL group stages twice in a row.



www.lask.at
+43 732 60 33 32 0
office@lask.at

Content Stadium

Simplify your social media processes with Content Stadium. Our content creation and distribution tools help 150+ sports clubs, leagues, federations, betting and media companies create, share and post on-brand social media content in a few clicks.



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Flowhaven

Flowhaven is a 360° licensing solution. Within Flowhaven you find ALL parts connected with a licensing agreement in one place. From royalty calculations to design approvals, all you need to be on top of your licensing agreements is in Flowhaven.



www.flowhaven.com
niko.taavitsainen@flowhaven.com

PAOK FC

PAOK FC was founded in 1926 from Greek refugees of Constantinople. Its colours are black and white and its emblem is the Two Headed Eagle, a symbol of the Byzantine Empire. PAOK is one of three clubs that were never relegated from the Greek top flight.



www.paokfc.gr
info@paokfc.gr

NŠ Mura

NŠ Mura is a football club in Slovenia with tradition, deeply involved with the region of Prekmurje. A club, that made a strong come back from 3rd division and have managed to win the championship in 2020/21 for the first time ever.



www.nsmura.si
info@nsmura.si
+386 2 62 00 318

Adelaide United FC

Founded in 2003, the South Australian-based club was crowned Champions of its domestic competition, the A-League, in 2016 and holds the Australian record for the most FFA Cup triumphs, lifting the trophy three times.



www.adelaideunited.com.au
info@aafc.com.au

The Football Brain

The Football Brain is a Central Information System for sports organizations. Much like the human brain, it aggregates all the data in one place, makes connections between data and improves the decision making process.



www.tfb.ai
contact@tfb.ai

FC Basel

With currently 20 championship titles, FC Basel is the second most successful club in the history of Swiss football. Internationally, FC Basel is also one of the most successful clubs in Switzerland thanks to successful campaigns in the Champions League and the European Cup.



www.fcb.ch
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Brandweb

Brandweb empowers ambitious organisations to go digital and set the pace for innovation. Since 2005, we have vast experience developing Mobile apps, E-commerce solutions, CRM / Fan engagement solutions. We make apps that RUN.



www.thebrandwebbers.com
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VfL Bochum 1848

Through passionate, honest and eventful football, we convey joy, fascination and enthusiasm. As boys from Bochum we are committed to the Ruhr area and its attitude to life: to work hard, to be self-confident and to be honest with each other.



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Rascasse

Rascasse is an AI-driven consumer insights platform for brands, i.e. a football club, that need to dramatically improve their understanding of fans, consumers, competition and markets to transform customer- and fan experience and increase revenues.



www.rascasse.com
kroeger@rascasse.com

NEW SEASON COMING SOON

<p>Seyu Seyu is an IT solution that helps sport industry partners to mitigate the financial burden of the crisis by reimbursing season ticket holders with a VIP remote fan experience via which they can connect with the team on the pitch in real-time.</p>  <p>www.seyu.hu tom.vechy@seyu.hu +36 30 890 2438</p>	<p>DVTK DVTK is one of the biggest multisport-club in Hungary, with more than 3,000 athletes. Our biggest and most popular family member is the football team, which is playing in the modern and beautiful DVTK Stadium.</p>  <p>www.dvtk.eu info@dvtk.eu +36 46530440</p>	<p>Azerion Sports Azerion Sports is a software and hardware independent company with tailor-made solutions. It helps clubs through a platform that ensures that the fans are mapped, involved and easy to approach. Via this platform Azerion Sports automates all commercial activities. This creates a real-time overview of turnover, occupation and spending.</p>  <p>www.azerion.com/azerion-sports info@azerion.com</p>	<p>AS Trenčín AS Trenčín is a top division football club, which is the successor of many football clubs in the city of Trenčín and continues the more than 115-year-old tradition of football in Trenčín. In 2015 and 2016 AS Trenčín won the national league and cup.</p>  <p>www.astrencin.sk astrencin@astrencin.sk</p>
<p>Horizm Horizm unlocks the digital audience opportunity in sport, connecting brands interested in reaching sports fans with rights holders looking for ways to better value and monetize their digital content.</p>  <p>www.horizm.com sam.grimley@horizm.com</p>	<p>Fortuna Liga The Fortuna Liga is the Slovak top division with 12 member clubs. The fully professional league was founded in 2009. The league has made major steps in the last five seasons with growing revenue numbers from centralized deals with media and naming rights partners. The league is an ordinary member of European Leagues.</p>  <p>www.fortunaliga.sk sekretariat@futbalulk.sk</p>	<p>Tymes4 by Ormer ICT Ormer ICT is a ticketing technology provider for professional football organisations. Our Tymess4 ticketing platform helps to bring ticketing to a higher level: grow revenue, bring efficiency, build fan engagement, while integrating more and better.</p>  <p>www.tymes4.com/ f.eijsden@ormer.nl</p>	<p>Knowledge Partner Sportscld International</p>  <p>www.sportscldinternational.com</p>
<p>Knowledge Partner Bernd Schusky</p> 	<p>Knowledge Partner Overdose</p>  <p>www.overdose.digital</p>	<p>Knowledge Partner Fan Experience Company</p>  <p>www.fanexperienceco.com</p>	<p>Knowledge Partner Ganassa</p>  <p>www.ganassa.jp</p>



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