



Entrepreneurship in Niche Sports Market: The Case of Juuke's American Football Gloves in Europe

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ABSTRACT

Title: Entrepreneurship in Niche Sports Market: The Case of Juuke's American Football Gloves in Europe

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This dissertation explores the market potential and financing landscape for launching a niche sports equipment brand, specifically American Football gloves, in Europe. While American Football and Flag Football are growing in popularity across the continent, European players currently face high prices and limited access to high-quality gloves, which are primarily imported from the United States. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining a Europe-wide player survey (n = 121) and secondary data from national football associations, this study estimates a total addressable market of approximately €27.59 million annually, driven by around 367,947 active players and recurring demand for gloves.

The findings confirm a clear market gap and demonstrate high willingness among athletes to adopt a Europe-based brand, particularly if it matches U.S. standards in grip, design, and durability, while offering better pricing and availability. The second part of the study analyzes the Austrian startup funding ecosystem. It concludes that venture capital is not for niche product-based startups like Juuke, while public grants, crowdfunding, and angel investment offer more viable paths. Crowdfunding stands out as a dual-purpose tool for early-stage funding and community engagement.

This research contributes to literature on niche market entry, sports entrepreneurship, and startup financing in non-tech industries. It offers practical insights for founders, investors, and policymakers aiming to support emerging sports markets in Europe. Juuke is presented as a case study of how strategic alignment between product-market fit and tailored financing can enable success in underserved segments of the sports industry.

Keywords: Niche Sports Market, American Football Gloves, Sports Entrepreneurship, Market Entry Strategy, Startup Financing, Sports Equipment Industry, Product Market Fit, Flag Football

SUMÁRIO

Título: Empreendedorismo em Mercados Desportivos de Nicho: O Caso das Luvas de Futebol Americano da Juuke na Europa

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Esta dissertação analisa o potencial de mercado e o financiamento para lançar uma marca europeia de luvas de Futebol Americano, um segmento de nicho em crescimento. Embora o Futebol Americano e o Flag Football ganhem popularidade na Europa, os jogadores enfrentam preços elevados e dependência de importações dos EUA.

Combinando um inquérito a 121 atletas e dados de federações nacionais, o estudo estima um mercado endereçável anual de 27,4 milhões de euros, sustentado por mais de 365.000 praticantes e procura recorrente por luvas. Os resultados revelam uma clara lacuna de oferta e confirmam a predisposição dos jogadores para adotar uma marca europeia que ofereça aderência, design e durabilidade comparáveis aos padrões norte-americanos, mas com melhor preço e disponibilidade.

A segunda parte avalia o ecossistema de financiamento austríaco. Conclui-se que o capital de risco não é adequado para startups de nicho como a Juuke. Em contrapartida, subsídios públicos, business angels e, sobretudo, crowdfunding apresentam-se como opções mais viáveis. O crowdfunding destaca-se como ferramenta dupla, permitindo financiamento inicial e envolvimento da comunidade.

O estudo contribui para a literatura sobre mercados de nicho, empreendedorismo desportivo e financiamento de startups não tecnológicas. Apresenta a Juuke como caso de estudo de como o alinhamento entre produto-mercado e financiamento adaptado pode gerar sucesso em segmentos pouco explorados da indústria desportiva.

Palavras-chave: Mercado Desportivo de Nicho, Luvas de Futebol Americano, Empreendedorismo Desportivo, Estratégia de Entrada no Mercado, Financiamento de Startups, Indústria de Equipamentos Desportivos, Adequação Produto-Mercado, Flag Football

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Completing this thesis also marks the conclusion of my master's program at Católica Lisbon—a journey filled with learning, growth, and personal development. I am deeply thankful to everyone who has accompanied me along the way: my professors, peers, and colleagues who contributed to an inspiring academic environment, and my friends and family for their unwavering encouragement and support. Studying and living in a new country has broadened my perspective in many ways, both professionally and personally. As I now prepare to enter the next chapter of my life and begin my first full-time position, I carry forward a strong sense of gratitude for all that this experience has taught me.

DISCLOSURE

I would like to acknowledge the use of ChatGPT, a large language model, as a supplementary tool during the development of this thesis. It was employed to support tasks such as refining language, improving clarity, and generating ideas during the early drafting stages. At all times, its use was guided by my own critical thinking and academic judgment. The analysis, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this thesis are entirely my own.

This disclosure is made in the spirit of transparency and in alignment with the academic integrity principles upheld by Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics.

August 10th, 2025

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and problem statement

In recent years, the global market for sports equipment has grown steadily. This development is mainly linked to more people taking part in sports and to continuous improvements in gear designed to enhance performance and also safety. Within this industry, the sport of American football, Flag Football, and their equipment in Europe still represents only a small niche. Football gloves in particular have not reached the same level of availability, even though the sport itself has slowly gained popularity across the continent. American Football is still strongly connected with the United States. However, European clubs and leagues have been expanding. This is supported by increasing media exposure, youth development programs, and international tournaments.

The European market for American Football gloves offers opportunities but also some challenges. In recent years, more clubs and organized leagues have been founded, especially in countries such as Germany, Austria, and France. For these reasons, there has been an increase in demand for dependable and high-quality gear. At the same time, however, the market is still dominated by U.S. companies like Nike, Under Armour, and Cutters. Because these brands control most of the distribution, products are often difficult to access locally. Therefore, athletes in Europe are faced with noticeably higher prices than players in the United States.

Juuke is a sports brand that is based in Vienna. It focuses on improving both accessibility and affordability in the American Football glove market. The goal of the company is to provide players at all different levels of professionalism with reliable, high-quality gloves at fair prices. In doing so, it is lowering one of the key barriers to participation in the sport. Looking ahead, Juuke intends to expand its product line to items such as cleats, shorts, and team merchandise.

While existing literature provides insights into sports branding, market entry strategies, and startup financing, there is limited research on launching an American Football equipment brand specifically for the European market. This gap presents an opportunity to explore how sports entrepreneurs can successfully navigate market entry, financial constraints, and understand demand potential.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite growing interest in American Football and Flag Football in Europe, there is no established European brand that specializes in American Football gloves. Most players continue to buy imported gear, mainly from the United States. These products are usually expensive and not easy to get. The fact that there is no local supply makes it harder for athletes to get the needed equipment. Therefore, in some cases, it limits their ability to compete at the same standard as players elsewhere.

For entrepreneurs, that situation creates an opportunity but also some obstacles. Setting up a new brand in such a narrow field is difficult, especially when it comes to financing. Investors usually prefer larger industries where customer demand is already proven. In Austria, different funding tools exist — for example, public grants, private venture capital, or even crowdfunding. Still, whether these options truly fit a small niche like American Football remains uncertain but will be talked about in this paper.

The main research problem in this thesis is the lack of specific knowledge on how to launch and build a sports equipment brand in a small European niche market. This issue is not only relevant for one single startup. For marketing managers, knowing more about niche sports can help when it comes to positioning a brand and reaching players and fans. For investors, it is about judging if startups in such a narrow field can actually work and are worth supporting. And for sports organizations like clubs, having access to good-quality equipment made in Europe can make a difference for player development and also for the long-term growth of American Football on the continent.

To tackle this problem, the dissertation looks at the current and future demand for American football gloves in Europe and examines which funding options are available for sports startups in Austria, as well as how suitable these options are for Juuke. Based on these objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: Is there sufficient market demand for American Football gloves in Europe?

RQ 2: What financing options are available for startups in Austria, and which are most suitable for Juuke?

1.3 Relevance

This research adds to the academic debate on sports entrepreneurship, niche markets, and startup financing in Europe. While there is already existing literature on sports branding, market segmentation, and consumer behavior, very little has been written about building an American Football equipment brand in the European context.

The study connects established theories such as Porter's (1980) work on market entry strategies, Aaker's (1996) ideas on brand positioning, and Huang and Sarigöllü's (2014) research on consumer behavior in sports marketing. By combining these perspectives with practical insights, this dissertation provides a case study on sports entrepreneurship in a growing but still underdeveloped market. It also offers a starting point for future research into niche sports businesses.

For entrepreneurs, investors, and managers, the results are meant to serve as a guide for entering smaller markets. The study shows how to identify demand for a niche product and evaluates which financing options in Austria are best suited for a sports startup like Juuke.

For sports leagues and clubs, the findings show the importance of having affordable and reliable equipment available for players. On the other hand, retailers and distributors can use the insights of the findings to better understand the potential of the American Football market in Europe.

1.4 Research Methods

To answer the research questions, this study uses a mixed-methods approach that brings together primary and secondary data. The idea behind this choice is to provide a broad and evidence-based view of both the market demand and the financing options for starting an American Football glove brand in Europe.

The primary data was gathered through an online survey. This survey was aimed at active American Football and Flag Football players in Europe. The questions of the survey focused on topics such as glove use, brand preferences, common problems, buying habits, and the willingness to try new brands. The survey was shared via social media and online forums, such as the website of Flag Football clubs. In addition, the snowball sampling was used by asking the participants to forward the survey to other team members. This approach made it possible to reach a broad mix of players from Austria, Germany, Spain, and Estonia.

The secondary data was gathered from different national football associations, reports about the industry, market research studies, and academic literature. This information was used in the paper to confirm the survey results, to estimate the number of registered players in each country, and to calculate the overall market size and potential revenue.

The market demand, financing options for Austrian startups and market entry strategies in niche markets were examined through secondary research. The focus was the target market and on funding sources such as public grants, business angels, crowdfunding, and venture capital. In addition, theories on niche strategies and brand positioning were looked at to better understand how a brand can establish itself in a specialized market.

This approach allows the study to consider both sides of the problem. On the one hand, the supply side, meaning the funding opportunities for startups. On the other hand, the demand side, meaning market size and consumer behavior. In addition, by looking at niche market entry strategies and brand positioning, the analysis also addresses how a brand like Juuke can place itself within this market. Together, these perspectives provide a solid foundation for answering the research questions.

1.5 Dissertation Outline

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter gives the academic background for the research questions. It looks at the literature on market demand for niche sports equipment in Europe and on startup financing in Austria. The chapter also introduces basic ideas on brand positioning, niche market entry, and entrepreneurial finance, which are then used later in the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter explains the research design and the reasons for choosing a mixed-methods approach. It explains how the survey was developed and how participants were selected. Furthermore, it describes which secondary data sources were used. Finally, it outlines how the data was analyzed and interpreted in relation to the research objectives.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

This chapter presents and interprets the results of both the primary and secondary research. The survey findings are used to identify patterns in glove usage, market dissatisfaction, and the players' willingness to try new brands. In addition, the analysis considers the feasibility of different financing options for startups. The results are then compared with the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Limitations

The final chapter brings together the main findings of the study and also addresses the research questions. It discusses both the academic and managerial implications, considers the limitations of the research, and points to areas for further investigation. In addition, it also includes a personal reflection and highlights the study's contribution to theory and practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews existing research on the demand for American Football gloves in Europe. It also focuses on participation trends and indicators for market growth. Furthermore, it examines financing options available to startups in Austria, such as public grants, venture capital, and crowdfunding, and considers how suitable these options could be for Juuke.

2.1 Market Demand in Europe

American Football and Flag Football have been gaining ground in Europe over the past years, especially with more players joining local leagues and the NFL bringing games to major cities like London and Munich (Victoria & Parkes, 2023). In this section, the focus is on what this growth means for the demand for football gloves. The discussion looks at how participation is developing, what players value when choosing equipment, and where the market shows signs of change. Understanding these points is important for judging Juuke's potential in Europe.

In the last few decades, American Football has slowly moved from being a small niche sport in Europe to something that is getting more attention. More people are playing and following the game. In Germany, this growth is most visible. Estimates suggest that around 19 million people there consider themselves NFL (National Football League) fans. 3.6 million people even follow the league regularly. The German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB) also states that there are now over 500 registered teams with more than 70,000 members. (Podewils, 2024)

Furthermore, Flag Football is also gaining popularity across Europe, especially in Austria. In 2025, there are already 53 teams across three leagues. (Die Vereine Des AFBÖ, 2025)

Over the past years, the NFL has taken several steps to make the sport more popular in Europe. One of the biggest moves was the International Series. The International Series brought regular-season games outside the U.S. to places like London and, later, also Munich. The first game in Munich in 2022 was a huge success and caught the attention of many people. The tickets were sold out quickly, and the game also had a big positive financial impact on the city. After that success, the NFL announced that it would also organize a game in Berlin in 2025. (Reuters, 2024)

Outside of Germany, the game is also getting more attention in other European countries. The International Federation of American Football (IFAF) is in charge of many national federations

across Europe. That shows that the sport is not only played casually but also has a structure (International Federation of American Football, n.d.). This is one reason why in 2021, the European League of Football (ELF) was founded. The ELF gives European players a professional stage and also makes the sport more visible to fans (What Is the European League of Football ELF? Explained!, n.d.).

Even with this progress, American football in Europe still struggles in some areas, especially when you compare it to a bigger sport like soccer. Improvements like better fields, youth programs, and reaching a wider audience are still missing or not developed enough (American Football Market Size & Industry Growth 2030, n.d.). At the same time, more people are playing and watching the sport each year, which shows that both American Football and Flag Football in Europe are moving in a positive direction (How Much Is the NFL Followed in Europe?, n.d.).

Although the market potential is clear, turning this opportunity into a real business requires sufficient financial resources to pay for product development, marketing, and distribution. The following chapter looks at the financing environment in Austria and considers which funding options are most suitable for Juuke.

2.2 Financing Options for Austria

Although the demand for American Football gloves in Europe is growing, launching Juuke on the market will require an upfront investment. Funding is needed not only for developing and introducing the first product line but also for scaling the business in a sustainable way. The major cost drivers include prototype development, working with manufacturers, meeting minimum order quantities (MOQs), and producing gloves in different models and sizes. On top of that, building a recognizable brand that can compete with established players like Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour requires additional spending on brand identity. Here, the cost drivers are logo design, packaging, and brand messaging, as well as digital marketing activities, including social media campaigns and collaborations with influencers (Startup-Gründung – Diese Acht Kostenpositionen Sollten Gründer Berücksichtigen, n.d.).

Given the clear market gap and the rising demand, Juuke is in a good position to enter this growing niche market. However, in order to take advantage of this opportunity, Juuke will need to find the right financing. The next sections outline the startup funding landscape in Austria

and assess which options are most relevant for Juuke's business model and also its stage of development.

2.2.1 Overview of Startup Financing in Austria

Austria has a very strong startup ecosystem with a mix of public and private financing options. These options include equity financing (bootstrapping, business angels, venture capital), debt instruments (loans, microcredits), and public support through grants and subsidies. In addition, there are other models, such as crowdfunding. For young startups in niche markets like Juuke, bootstrapping, public funding, and crowdfunding are usually the most realistic ways to receive funding. According to the Austrian Startup Monitor, 66% of startups are first financed with the founder's own money. Furthermore, more than half also benefit from public grants. Venture capital, by contrast, is mostly used for tech-driven companies. It is also only used by 13% of Austrian startups (Leitner et al., 2023). The academic research confirms this: around 69% of Austrian startups rely on bootstrapping, 48% on public funding, 27% on business angels, 14% on venture capital, and 8% on crowdfunding (Dulovits et al., 2020). Bootstrapping is often considered an effective strategy because it allows the founders to retain control of the company (Jha, 2024; Van Auken et al., 1996).

What is bootstrapping exactly? Bootstrapping refers to the strategy of financing a new business through internal resources and cost-saving strategies. This means, a founder is not relying on external investors. The typical bootstrapping techniques include using personal savings, reinvesting early revenues, delaying payments, or minimizing overhead costs (Van Auken et al., 1996). The academic literature highlights that bootstrapping enables founders to retain full ownership and decision-making control. However, it can also limit the speed of scaling the business if no additional capital sources are accessed (Jha, 2024). For a niche product startup such as Juuke, bootstrapping can therefore serve as a smart entry strategy until other financing channels, such as public grants or crowdfunding, are secured.

2.2.2 Public Grants and Start-Up Support Programs

In Austria, the main public support for startups comes from the Austria Wirtschaftsservice GmbH (aws) and the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG). Both offer different kinds of help for young companies. The help ranges from grants and guarantees to seed financing and advice. For instance, aws provides PreSeed grants of up to €200,000 and Seed financing that

can reach €800,000 (aws, 2021). FFG, on the other hand, mainly helps companies with product development through research and innovation programs (Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft FFG, n.d.). In addition to the direct funding, founders can also seek help from startup initiatives such as INiTS, weXelerate, or Startup Salzburg. These incubators and accelerators not only connect entrepreneurs with mentors and investors but sometimes also provide early-stage capital (SCALEup - Der Inkubator - INiTS, n.d.; Startup Salzburg - Beste Voraussetzungen Für Gründer:Innen, n.d.; Venturecake - The Co-Owned Accelerator, n.d.)

2.2.3 Venture Capital and Business Angels

The venture capital market in Austria has developed in recent years, but it is still relatively small compared to countries like Germany or the UK. Well-known Austrian VC firms include Speedinvest and Capital300 (Butcher, 2020). However, these investors tend to focus on fast-growing sectors such as SaaS, online marketplaces, or health tech. For that reason, niche product-based startups like Juuke often struggle to attract venture capital. However, one way to attract VC firms is if you can show clear traction, integrate a scalable digital element, or operate in a highly underserved market (Arnold et al., 2024; Jokinen, n.d.).

For young product startups, business angels are often a more realistic option than venture capital. In Austria, groups like the Austrian Angel Investors Association (AAIA) connect founders with potential backers. Unlike institutional investors, business angels are usually more flexible and sometimes willing to support lifestyle or niche brands. On the other side, the founders have to show expertise, a strong brand idea, and a good market strategy (Top Angel Investor Networks to Fund Your Startup in 2025, n.d.). Empirical studies also show that startups that are funded by business angels tend to raise larger amounts of capital and are more likely to attract follow-on investments compared to those relying only on crowdfundering (Bonini et al., 2025).

In some cases, business angels can also provide funding through convertible instruments like SAFE agreements (Simple Agreement for Future Equity) or convertible loans. These models give founders more flexibility because the company valuation is pushed to a later funding round. For a startup such as Juuke, this can be a useful way to secure early capital without having to give up equity right away. (Wared, 2022)

Research shows that venture capital and business angels often complement each other in startup ecosystems. In Austria, venture capital remains relatively limited, with a noticeable gap in funding rounds between €2 and €5 million. This makes it particularly challenging for product-based ventures to secure substantial equity financing (Christopoulos, 2015). At the European level, institutions such as the EIF and the EIB have increasingly promoted venture debt as a way of closing this gap by offering non-dilutive growth capital (Arnold et al., 2024).

Business angels, by contrast, are especially important in the early stages. They not only provide capital but also, as mentioned before, bring mentoring, credibility, and access to valuable networks (Lange et al., 2024). Data from the EIF show that experienced angels often invest together and remain actively involved in their invested firms, which can improve the likelihood of success (Gvetadze et al., 2020).

For Juuke, this means that the support from business angels could act as a bridge between early bootstrapping and later stages of growth. Later, venture debt or institutional programs become relevant once the company has reached a more advanced phase.

2.2.4 Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding has become an increasingly popular tool for product-based startups in Austria, especially in the sports, fashion, and lifestyle sectors. On Platforms such as Startnext, Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and the Austria-based Conda, startups can build a community, raise initial funding without giving up equity, and validate their idea. (List of Startups Crowdfunding Platforms in Austria | CrowdSpace, n.d.)

The literature shows that crowdfunding can help startups and small businesses to get funding because they often struggle to get traditional financing, such as bank loans, angel investors, or venture capital. This makes it especially relevant for early-stage, product-driven ventures (Hoque, 2024). Data from European platforms like Startnext and Kickstarter also show that many consumer projects in Europe have successfully raised money by reaching out directly to backers (Galkiewicz & Galkiewicz, 2018).

For Juuke, crowdfunding has two main advantages. Firstly, it provides the initial capital needed to cover manufacturing minimum order quantities (MOQs), and secondly, it helps build a community of early adopters in the European American Football and Flag Football scene. Because these sports are still grassroots in nature, a well-prepared campaign that focuses on

performance, design, and fair pricing could connect strongly with players, clubs, and supporters.

Crowdfunding also enables founders to test pricing models, collect customer feedback early, and demonstrate market traction. This strengthens the business for further financing (Galkiewicz & Galkiewicz, 2018). For example, Woom, a Vienna-based children’s bike brand, used crowdfunding at an early stage to engage its audience and validate market demand before expanding internationally (And Suddenly It Went Woom - Kreativwirtschaft.At, n.d.).

2.2.5 Comparison of Financing Options

The following table provides a comparative overview of the main financing options available to Juuke at its current stage:

Financing Option	Advantages	Challenges	Fit for Juuke
Bootstrapping	Full control, no weakening of ownership	Limited capital, slower scaling	✓ Short-term
Public Grants (aws)	Also no weakening of ownership, designed for early stage	Competitive application process	✓ High potential
Angel Investors	Flexible, niche-friendly	Smaller ticket sizes, time-intensive outreach	✓ If traction is shown
Venture Capital	Large investment potential	Low relevance for niche non-tech brands	✗ Not ideal
Crowdfunding	Builds community, validates demand	Requires upfront marketing & logistics planning	✓ Strong opportunity

Table 1: Comparison of Financing Options, Source: Chapter 2

2.2.6 Academic Perspectives on Startup Financing

The academic literature highlights that financing strategies are not interchangeable but often complementary. Bootstrapping allows startups to survive the early stages while retaining control (Jha, 2024; Van Auken et al., 1996). Business angels play a crucial role by providing not only capital but also mentorship and network effects, which have been shown to improve startup survival and follow-on funding chances (Bonini et al., 2025; Lange et al., 2024). Venture capital in Austria is limited in scope, focusing mainly on technology-driven companies, but instruments like venture debt can complement equity financing in later stages (Arnold et al., 2024; Christopoulos, 2015). Finally, debt instruments such as bank loans are less common in the very early stages of startups but can support scaling once revenue streams stabilize (Andrieu et al., 2021).

To sum up, Juuke does not fit the usual profile that most venture capital firms look for. However, Austria has several other funding options that work better for young, product-focused startups. A mix of public grants, bootstrapping, and crowdfunding offers a practical way to raise the capital needed to get the business off the ground and support early growth. As the brand develops, proof through crowdfunding or first sales could also make it easier to attract support from business angels or, later on, institutional investors.

While the previous section outlined the financing environment in Austria and identified potential funding strategies for Juuke, access to capital alone does not guarantee success. Equally important is the ability to enter and position the brand effectively within a niche market. To build a sustainable business, Juuke must therefore not only secure suitable financing but also develop a clear market entry strategy tailored to the unique characteristics of the European American Football equipment sector. The following section discusses the dynamics of niche market entry and highlights strategic considerations relevant for Juuke.

2.3 Market Entry in Niche Markets

Niche markets can be a good opportunity for startups because bigger companies often do not focus on them. These markets usually consist of smaller groups of consumers who have very specific needs. This makes them interesting to target, but at the same time also a bit risky and more difficult to handle. (Porter, 1990)

There are three general strategies that Juuke can use to compete: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. Out of these, the focus strategy fits niche markets best. The idea is that Juuke can concentrate on a small segment and meet the needs of this group better than bigger firms. For American Football gloves in Europe, this could mean solving problems like limited availability, high prices, and a lack of variety. By doing this, Juuke could position itself in a better way compared to the large global brands. (Porter, 1990)

Having a clear strategy is not enough on its own. Building a strong brand identity is just as important. A clear identity helps create trust and loyalty, especially when customers do not have many alternatives. For Juuke, this would mean that offering affordable and good-quality gloves is important, but it will also need to build an image that connects with players and clubs in Europe. (Aaker, 1995)

Brand awareness is another key factor. Especially, awareness has a big influence on how consumers make decisions, particularly when new brands enter the market. Even if the product is good, it will not succeed if players do not know it exists. For Juuke, this means investing in marketing. This could be done, for example, via social media, local football initiatives, or even working together with associations, so that players become aware of the brand and take it seriously. (Huang & Sarigollu, 2014)

Since niche markets are small, companies also have to think carefully about how to use their resources. Large marketing campaigns usually do not make sense in this case. More targeted options, like direct online sales, building a strong digital presence via Instagram and TikTok, and connecting closely with the community, are often more effective. These kinds of activities also help to get early adopters, who can then spread the word and attract more people. (Aaker, 1995; Huang & Sarigollu, 2014)

To conclude, entering a niche market is not only about having a strategy. It also requires a clear brand identity and enough awareness so that customers know the brand exists and trust it. If these points are combined well, a startup like Juuke has a realistic chance to establish itself in the European American Football glove market. (Aaker, 1995; Huang & Sarigollu, 2014; Porter, 1990)

Having explored the theoretical background of niche market entry, brand positioning, and financing strategies in Chapter 2, the next step is to examine how these concepts can be applied

to the specific case of Juuke. To do so, a structured research design was developed that combines both primary and secondary data. The following chapter outlines the methodology of this study, including the research approach and data collection methods.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present and explain the methodology used to study the subject at hand and to reach conclusions about the hypothesis formulated in Chapter 2. To achieve this, I adopted a mixed-methods approach consisting of a quantitative Google Survey and a literature review of relevant academic and industry sources.

Both primary and secondary research methods were used to address the research questions of this study. To examine whether there is sufficient market demand for American Football gloves in Europe, a combination of a literature review and an online survey was used. The literature review provided theoretical context on market trends and consumer behavior, while the survey gathered empirical data directly from potential customers. To answer the second research question, what financing options are available for startups in Austria and which of these are most suitable for Juuke, a comprehensive literature review was conducted, focusing on entrepreneurial finance and funding opportunities in Austria.

3.1 Research Approach

To gather empirical data on consumer preferences and purchasing behavior within the European American Football glove market, an online survey was conducted using Google Forms. The goal was to explore attitudes toward current glove offerings, satisfaction levels, and openness to new brands among active players.

Before public distribution, the survey was piloted with five amateur players from Austria and Germany. Based on their feedback, adjustments were made to clarify wording, improve the logical flow of questions, and add questions that were important for the players. This piloting phase helped enhance the survey's clarity and accessibility, thereby improving response quality and participation rates.

The specific information collected, along with the way it was structured and grouped, is explained in detail in Section 3.3.1.

3.2 Secondary Data

In addition to the primary data collected through the Google Survey and literature review, secondary data was also obtained by reaching out directly to national American Football associations across Europe. Through email correspondence, statistics on the number of registered Flag Football and American Football players in various countries were gathered. This data served as a crucial input for estimating market size, identifying key target regions, and understanding national differences in sport popularity. In chapter 4.6, a detailed calculation of the number of players is presented.

3.3 Data Collection

The target population for this study consists of American Football and Flag Football players aged 12 and older, living in various European countries. These individuals represent active participants in the sport who regularly purchase and use specialized equipment such as gloves. For this reason, they are a highly relevant audience for assessing the market demand. A total of 121 valid responses were collected through an online survey. The survey was distributed via social media platforms, American Football community groups, and direct outreach within the sporting network. This sample size ensures a sufficient basis for descriptive statistical analysis and the identification of key patterns in consumer behavior.

The survey used a convenience sampling approach. It was supported by snowball sampling, where the participants were asked to share the survey with teammates and other players. While this method cannot provide full statistical generalization for all American Football players in Europe, it still gave access to a broad mix of respondents. The answers were collected from athletes in different countries, age groups, as well as from various playing positions such as Wide Receivers, Running Backs, and Quarterbacks. This variety helps to strengthen the credibility of the findings because it reflects a wide range of perspectives on purchasing habits, brand loyalty, and difficulties in accessing equipment. All together, the data provides a solid basis for evaluating the business potential of Juuke's American Football gloves in the European market.

3.3.1 Measurement / Indicators

To ensure the collection of relevant data for assessing the market demand, the survey was structured around key topics. These topics were obtained from the research objectives and the specific context of the American Football glove market in Europe. In total, the survey consisted of 17 structured questions. The questions were grouped into thematic sections that reflect the focus of the study, such as user profiles, brand preferences, purchasing behavior, and openness to new market entrants.

1. Demographic and Player Profile:

This section gathered basic information such as the country of residence and what kind of position the players hold.

2. Glove Usage Patterns:

Participants were asked whether they use gloves during practice and games, and how many pairs of gloves they purchase per season. These indicators helped estimate the consumption frequency and give an idea about the recurring demand.

3. Brand Affiliation and Satisfaction:

To analyze brand loyalty and perceived value, players reported from which brands they currently buy their gloves from. Furthermore, they answered questions about how satisfied they are with the current offering of gloves in terms of price, availability, range of offerings, style, and personal connection to the brand. Lastly, the players stated what factors (quality, design, brand reputation, brand loyalty, price, and availability) would influence them to choose a particular brand. This section captured subjective brand performance and benchmarked dominant players (Nike, Adidas, Under Armour) against user expectations.

4. Purchasing Behavior and Price Sensitivity:

First, respondents were asked to indicate their preferred price range for gloves. They then specified where they usually purchase their equipment (e.g., local stores versus online shops). This section helped to highlight common purchasing channels, the sensitivity to price, and key difficulties related to product availability.

5. Openness to New Brands:

An important part of Juuke's value proposition was tested by asking players whether they would be willing to try a new European glove brand. Their answers offered an insight into how open the market is to new options and how likely it is that players switch brands. These two aspects are crucial for assessing the chances of a successful product launch.

6. Qualitative Input:

At the end of the survey, participants were given an open-ended question where they could share their thoughts on glove availability, pricing, and product features. These qualitative responses helped to put the quantitative results into context. In addition, it also added new topics that were not covered by the closed-ended questions.

The survey mainly used multiple-choice and rating-scale questions so that players could answer quickly, and the results could be compared more easily. Alongside these structured questions, the open-ended section added more detailed insights. Overall, the survey looked at things like how often players buy gloves, how satisfied they are with current brands, what problems they face when buying, and whether they would consider switching to another brand. These points are closely connected to the main research question on market demand.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using basic descriptive statistics, market estimation methods (secondary data), and by reviewing the open comments. This mix made it possible to show clear numerical trends while also including the perspectives and experiences shared by the players.

Descriptive Statistics

- The responses were analyzed by looking at frequencies and percentages, for example, in relation to brand choice, the number of glove pairs purchased per season, and preferred price ranges.
- Average satisfaction scores on a 1–5 scale were also calculated for the most common brands that are used, such as Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour. By doing this, it was easy to highlight the differences in player satisfaction.
- The results were summarized in tables to highlight key patterns in player behavior.

Market Extrapolation

- The official player registration numbers from selected national associations were used as a basis for participation rates
- This participation ratio was applied to the total populations of the 24 countries competing in the 2025 European Flag Football Championship to estimate the number of active players.
- By combining this player base with the average number of glove pairs purchased per season (derived from survey results), an estimate of the annual market size in terms of units and monetary value was calculated.

As already mentioned before, the exact calculations will be presented in 4.6.

Qualitative Insights

- The most common points raised by players were the limited choice in local stores, the high costs and long waiting times linked to imports, and the lack of established European brands. These issues were seen as the main difficulties when buying gloves.
- This qualitative feedback, which was retrieved from open-ended questions, added context to the numerical results. They show how players actually experience the market and where their needs are not being met.

This approach made it possible to look at both the numbers on player behavior and the reasons behind their choices and frustrations across Europe.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

This chapter presents the findings derived from both the primary survey and secondary data collection. The goal is to assess the current market demand for American Football gloves in Europe and also evaluate consumer preferences and pain points. The results are organized into quantitative trends, qualitative insights, and data from national associations.

4.1.1 Current Market Demand for American Football Gloves

Europe can be seen as a growing market for American Football gloves, since more people have started to play the sport in different countries. As already mentioned in earlier parts of this study, both American Football and Flag Football have gained many new players in recent years. With more people on the field, the need for equipment also rises. Gloves are one of the items players look for most, especially because American and Flag Football players need them, and they improve their ability to catch the ball. (Jain, 2021)

4.1.2 Market Size and Growth

According to recent estimates, the European market for American football gloves could grow by about 6.2% per year until 2025 (Patel, 2025). This number shows that demand is not just increasing for a short time but is rising steadily, which points to a stronger need for gloves among players across Europe (Fernando, 2024).

Data collected through emails with several national American Football associations also shows the same pattern. In Portugal, Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg, Norway, Italy, France, and Germany, there are around 118,986 registered players in both American Football and Flag Football (see Appendix 3). A striking detail is that the number of Flag Football players increased by almost 70% within just one year. This sharp rise highlights how quickly the sport is growing and suggests that the foundation for further market expansion is already in place (Erhardt & Jan, 2023).

4.1.3 Sample Characteristics

The survey gathered 121 valid responses from players across several European countries. The largest share came from Austria (70%), followed by Sweden (25.5%), Germany (7.3%), Spain (4.5%), and smaller proportion from Estonia.

Looking at the different playing positions, the majority stated that they play as Receivers (38.8%), followed by Cornerbacks (18.2%), Safeties (13.2%), and smaller groups of Quarterbacks, Centers, Linemen, Running Backs, and Linebackers. This shows that gloves are concentrated in skill positions, like Receivers. There, gloves are most relevant because the Receiver's job is to catch the ball. (see Appendix 2, Section 2)

4.1.4 Glove Usage and Consumption

Nearly all respondents (95.9%) reported that they are using gloves during training and games.

Regarding the frequency of purchasing gloves, 46.3% stated that they buy one pair per year. 30.6% of the respondents bought two pairs, and 16.5% bought less than one pair per year. A small minority purchased more than two pairs annually. This indicates a recurring demand for gloves among players. (see Appendix 2, Section 3)

4.1.5 Brand Usage

The most popular brand was Nike (55.6%), followed by Under Armour (28.2%) and Adidas (19.7%). Other brands, such as Grip Boost (10.3%) and Cutter (9.4%) are less popular. In addition, 17.1% reported that they use other niche brands. These figures underline the strong dominance of two U.S.-based companies in the European market. (see Appendix 2, Section 4)

4.1.6 Purchase Decision Factors

In this section, the respondents were asked about their reasons for purchasing a specific brand. When asked about the most important factors influencing purchase decisions, respondents emphasized:

- Quality and performance (82.5%)
- Price and value for money (50.8%)
- Design and style (37.5%)

- Availability and accessibility (33.3%)

On the other side, brand reputation (14.2%) and brand loyalty (9.2%) were less decisive.

In addition, the respondents also answered questions about how satisfied they are with the current offering. Likert-scale evaluations confirmed that players are not satisfied with the price, availability, and range of offerings. 61 respondents stated that they are not satisfied at all or not satisfied with the current price of gloves. Furthermore, 65 players also reported that they are not satisfied or not satisfied at all with the availability of gloves in Europe. Lastly, 58 players stated that they are not satisfied with the range of offerings in the European market. The personal connection on the other side is not as important for players as other factors. (see Appendix 2, Section 4)

4.1.7 Openness to New Brands

In this section, respondents were asked about how willing they would be to try alternative glove suppliers:

- 43.3% Very Open
- 26.7% Somewhat Open
- 14.2% Neutral
- 13.3% Somewhat Reluctant
- 2.5% Very Reluctant

This shows that, despite current brand dominance, there is openness among the players toward new brands that offer high-quality gloves with good availability and fair pricing. (see Appendix 2, Section 5)

4.1.8 Switching Motivations

When evaluating reasons to switch brands, the most important factors were better price/value and better availability/accessibility. 47 players stated they a better price will definitely make them change to another brand. Furthermore, 62 players reported that better availability/accessibility will also likely or definitely make them change to another brand. In contrast, word of mouth and marketing strategies were surprisingly rated as moderately important. (see Appendix 2, Section 5)

4.1.9 Accessibility of Gloves in Europe

A clear majority (68.3%) reported that they have difficulties when buying gloves in Europe, whereas only 31.7% felt that there is sufficient accessibility. This underlines a structural supply gap in the European market. (see Appendix 2, Section 6)

4.1.10 Perception of Prices

Most respondents (83.3%) stated that gloves are currently too expensive, with only 16.7% disagreeing. (see Appendix 2, Section 6)

4.1.11 Willingness to Pay

When asked about price points, the majority of players were comfortable with a range between €30 and €70. Specifically:

- 17,4% up to €30
- 23.1% up to €40,
- 32.2% up to €50,
- 20.7% up to €60
- 17.4% up to €70

A lower willingness to pay was indicated by 5% of the respondents (up to €20). On the other side, a small minority accepted higher prices (up to €80: 8.3%; up to €90: 3.3%). No respondents reported paying more than €90. (see Appendix 2, Section 6)

4.1.12 Purchase Channels

In this section, the respondents were asked about their preferred purchasing channels. 57% of the players preferred online shopping, while 43% favored specialty sports shops. This highlights e-commerce as the dominant distribution method, though physical retail remains relevant. (see Appendix 2, Section 6)

4.1.13 Open-Ended Responses

The open comment section provided additional qualitative insights. Some key topics that were not included in the closed-question section are:

- **Fit and performance issues:** Some players emphasized that gloves often stretch too much or lose grip quickly.
- **Limited options for women and small-handed players:** Female players often reported being restricted to youth sizes because there is a lack of women-sized gloves. This could sometimes lead to a lack of professional quality.
- **Design preferences:** A segment of respondents expressed a desire for gloves that combine a strong grip with an appealing design.
- **Retail availability:** Many players complained about the absence of gloves in local stores, particularly in Sweden, forcing them to rely on online orders or purchases in the U.S.
- **Price concerns:** Several players stressed that gloves are overpriced in Europe relative to quality, often leading them to import from the U.S.
- **Custom products:** A few participants mentioned interest in customizable gloves to address individual needs.

These qualitative insights complement the quantitative data by showing not only what players buy but also the frustrations that they experience. They also link directly to broader market dynamics, such as target group characteristics, the competitive landscape, and revenue potential. To build on the survey findings, the following sections provide a deeper analysis of these factors, drawing from both primary and secondary data. (see Appendix 2, Section 7)

4.2 Target Market Characteristics

The results from the survey show that around 94% of players use gloves regularly in both training and official games. More than half of the respondents also stated in the survey that they need at least two pairs of gloves per season. These results make it clear that the majority of players not only wear one pair of gloves, but the demand is recurring.

The target market for Juuke consists mainly of players who are aged between 12 to 35 years. Furthermore, they take part in amateur and semi-professional leagues across Europe. This group looks for gloves that have a high grip performance, are durable, and have attractive designs. Furthermore, they should be comparable to products that are available in the United States (International Federation of American Football, n.d.). The survey results also show that it is very important that the gloves are affordable and available, which is, due to the limited availability in Europe, not always the case.

4.3 Competitive Landscape

The European market for American Football gloves is still dominated by big international brands such as Nike and Under Armour (Zheng, 2024). These companies are well-known and have strong distribution networks, but the availability of gloves in Europe is inconsistent. Prices are often higher than in the U.S. because of import costs and the lack of local suppliers (Buying Goods Online Coming from a Non-European Union Country - European Commission, n.d.). Many players mentioned in the survey that it is hard to find a good selection of gloves in local shops. Therefore, they often need to order from international online retailers instead. This gap in the market shows potential for a European brand like Juuke to offer better access and fairer pricing.

To visualize this situation more clearly, Figure 1 presents a perceptual map of the main glove brands. It positions existing competitors along the dimensions of price and availability and highlights the market space that Juuke can occupy. The map shows that while established U.S. brands dominate the high-price, low-availability quadrant, the combination of fair pricing and strong availability in Europe remains largely unaddressed, representing Juuke's opportunity.

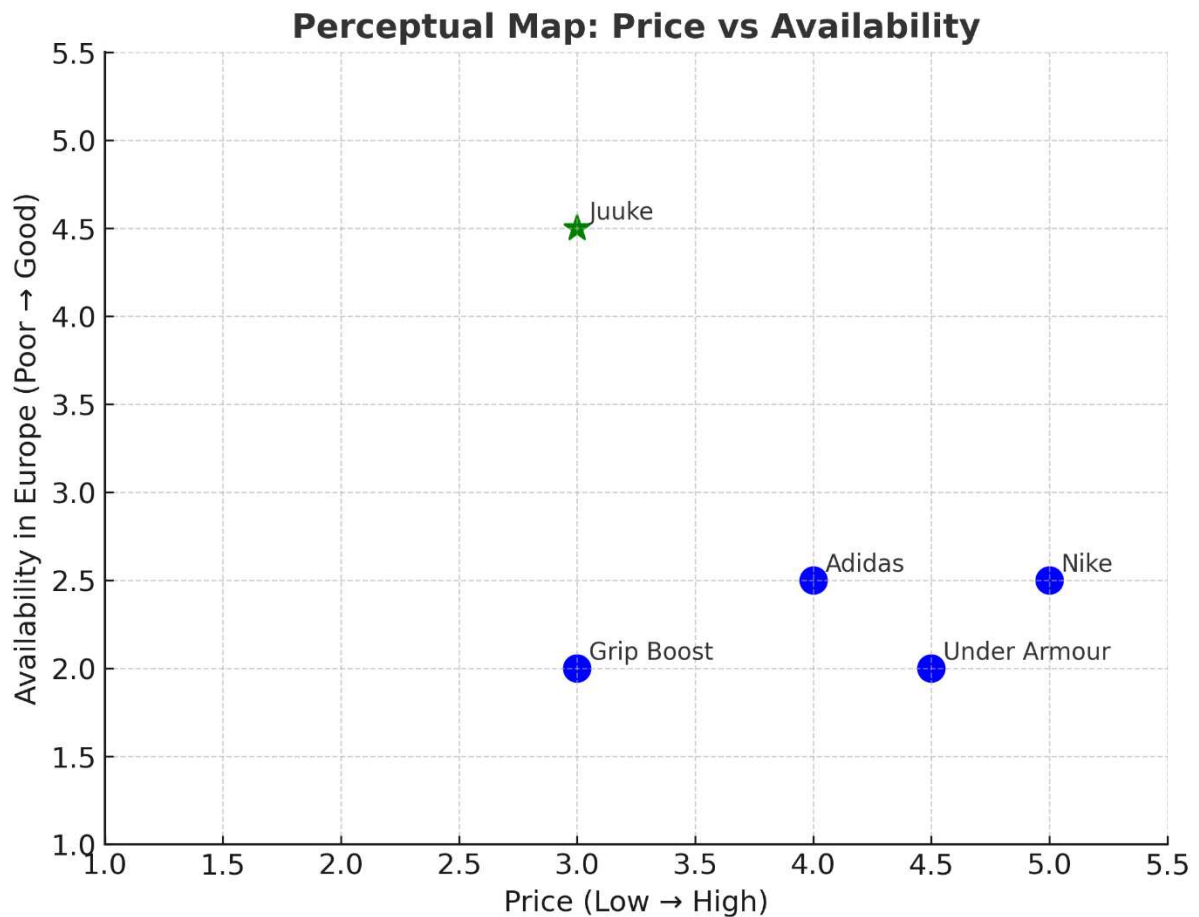


Figure 1: Perceptual map of Glove Brands in Europe, Source: own analysis

4.4 Revenue Potential

The number of registered players in Europe is increasing, and since most players buy new gloves every year, there is clear revenue potential for Juuke.

A more detailed projection of the market, using the player registration data from national associations and average glove consumption, will be shown in Chapter 4.6. There, the secondary data is used to calculate the total addressable market for American Football gloves in Europe and to outline initial revenue scenarios for Juuke.

4.5 Painpoints for Athletes

As the sports of American Football and Flag Football grow across Europe, players face several challenges when it comes to getting affordable and easily available gloves. These problems need to be understood to have success in the market and gain a competitive edge.

The survey results show that most players rely on big brands like Nike, Adidas, or Under Armour. At the same time, many reported that gloves are hard to find in Europe and are often too expensive, which highlights key challenges in the current market.

Several factors contribute to these challenges. Firstly, accessibility remains limited. In Austria, for example, there is only one retail store that sells American Football gloves in the whole country. Due to high demand and limited supply, the available gloves often sell out within days.

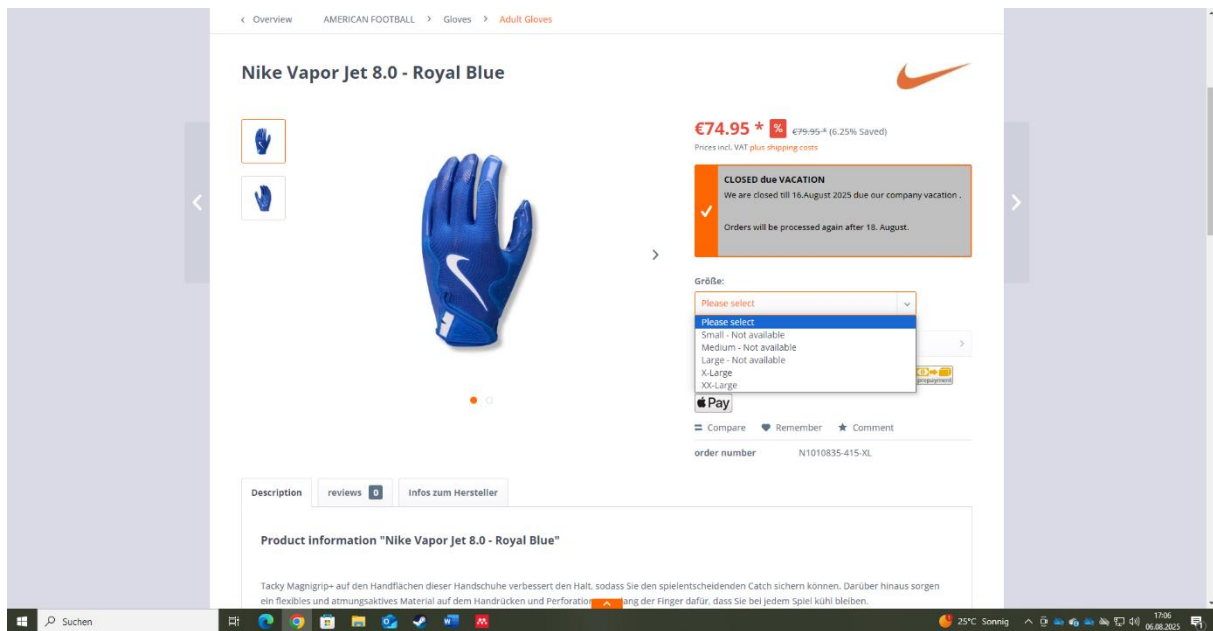


Figure 2: Nike Vapo Jet 8.0 - Not available in the only shop in Austria, Source: Teamzone, 2025

Secondly, the prices for gloves in local European stores are significantly higher than in the United States. For instance, Nike gloves sold in Austria typically cost between €70.00 and €90.00. In the United States, the same gloves usually cost around €50.00, representing a price premium of almost 50%. (Nike Handschuhe | Handschuhe / Football Gloves / Zubehör | AMERICAN FOOTBALL | TEAMZONE| American Football Und Baseball Shop, n.d.)

Topseller




 <p>Nike Superbad 7.0 - Black/White</p> <p>€ 84,95 * €89,95 ‡</p>	 <p>Nike D-Tack 7.0 - Black</p> <p>€ 94,95 * €109,95 ‡</p>	 <p>Nike WOMENS Vapor Jet 8.0 - Black</p> <p>€ 74,95 * €79,95 ‡</p>
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Figure 3: Prices of gloves in Austria (already discounted), Source: Teamzone, 2025



 <p>Nike Vapor Jet 8.0 Women's Football Gloves (1 Pair) 3 Colors \$50</p>	 <p>Nike Superbad 7.0 Big Kids' Football Gloves 2 Colors \$55</p>
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Figure 4: Prices of gloves in the US, Source: Nike, 2025

Even though big brands like Adidas, Nike, and Under Armour do sell products in Europe, they do not provide the same range of American Football-specific items, such as gloves, as they do in the United States (Products. Nike.Com, n.d.). In many cases, these products are not offered in the European webshops (Produkte. Nike DE, n.d.). Because of this, players often turn to

international resellers or order directly from the U.S., which leads to high shipping costs, long delivery times, and extra import duties (Buying Goods Online Coming from a Non-European Union Country - European Commission, n.d.). As a result, it is still much harder for European athletes to get high-quality gloves at fair prices compared to players in the U.S.

While these challenges underline the structural gaps in the current market, it is equally important to understand the overall scale of the opportunity. Therefore, the next section turns to secondary data to estimate the potential market size for American Football gloves in Europe.

4.6 Secondary Data Insights

To assess the potential market size for American Football gloves in Europe, the initial focus was expanded beyond the core countries of Austria and Germany. All 24 national teams participating in the 2025 European Flag Football Championship in Paris were included (IFAF, 2025). In addition, Luxembourg was also included. This broader scope was chosen to reflect countries with a recognized competitive and organizational structure for the sport. This was demonstrated by qualifying for the European Championship. Each of these countries has an active federation and a growing ecosystem around Flag Football, which indicates the professional development of the sport.

For eight of these countries, Austria, Germany, France (FFFA, 2023), Luxembourg, Norway, Switzerland, Italy, and Portugal, official data from national football associations was obtained. The data indicated a combined total of approximately 122,947 registered Flag and American Football players. Based on their respective populations, this corresponds to an average participation rate of 0.087%. (see Appendix 3, Sections 1-7)

Using this ratio, I extrapolated the number of players for the remaining countries that participate in the European Championship: Great Britain, Finland, Belgium, Georgia, Croatia, Slovakia, Spain, Israel, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Ukraine, Poland, Ireland, Czechia, and Slovenia. Applying the 0.087% participation rate to the combined population of all 24 countries (approx. 526 million) results in an estimated 367,947 active players across the region.

Assuming an average consumption of 1.5 glove pairs per player per year—covering both Flag and Tackle usage, the resulting annual demand is approximately:

- 551,921 glove pairs

- At an average retail price of €49.99 per pair, this equates to a theoretical market value of approximately €27.59 million per year

This approach provides a data-driven estimate grounded in real registration numbers and population-based projections. By focusing on the 24 countries participating in the 2025 European Championships, this model targets markets with verified interest, institutional support, and an active player base, thereby offering a realistic and scalable foundation for market entry and growth.

4.7 Discussion

4.7.1 Alignment of Results with Research Objectives

This study set out to answer two key research questions:

1. Is there sufficient market demand for American football gloves in Europe?
2. What financing options are available for startups in Austria, and which are most suitable for Juuke?

The findings provide clear evidence that both questions can be answered affirmatively. The primary and secondary data confirm a strong and growing demand for gloves, especially driven by the rise of Flag Football and American Football participation in Germany, Austria, and beyond. The recurring nature of glove purchases and the dissatisfaction with current market offerings validate Juuke's value proposition: affordable, available, Europe-based glove alternatives.

On the financing side, the research shows that public grants, bootstrapping, and crowdfunding represent realistic, strategic entry points for Juuke. On the other hand, venture capital is less accessible for non-tech product-based businesses in their early stages and therefore not the best option for Juuke.

4.7.2 Connection to the Literature

The results reinforce the trends identified in the literature review. Previous work, e.g., (Die Vereine Des AFBÖ, 2025; Podewils, 2024) pointed to the growing popularity of American Football and Flag Football in Europe. This research not only confirms those developments but quantifies them through survey data and national association statistics.

Moreover, the pain points identified in the primary data align with theoretical frameworks on underserved niche markets (Aaker, 1995; Porter, 1990). Aaker's brand positioning in niche environments highlights the importance of aligning product features with unmet consumer expectations, which is exactly what Juuke aims to do.

4.7.3 Implications for Academic and Professional Practice

From an academic perspective, this thesis contributes to the limited amount of research on sports entrepreneurship in smaller European markets. It demonstrates how theories on financing and market entry can be applied to a very specific, practice-oriented case and offers a basis for further studies on non-mainstream sports industries.

On the professional side, the results provide useful guidance for young entrepreneurs in Europe. A venture like Juuke can learn from these findings by focusing on underserved market segments, designing products around the actual needs of players, and choosing funding options that are realistic for their stage of development.

For policymakers and those building the startup ecosystem, the study underlines the importance of maintaining accessible funding instruments that do not require founders to give up equity, particularly in non-tech fields.

Overall, the discussion shows how the research connects to the initial questions, adds to the existing literature, and points to practical implications. Despite certain limitations, the relevance of the results for founders, investors, and sports organizations in Europe is evident.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 Main Findings and Conclusions

This study aimed to explore the potential for launching and financing a niche sports equipment brand, specifically, American Football gloves, in the emerging European market. Two central research questions guided the analysis:

RQ1: Is there sufficient market demand for American Football gloves in Europe?

The research demonstrates a clear and growing demand for American Football gloves in Europe. This is especially driven by the increased participation in both American Football and Flag Football. Primary survey data and secondary association statistics revealed that the market currently consists of approximately 122,947 registered players across Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Norway, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Switzerland. The average player purchases 1.5 pairs of gloves per year, resulting in an estimated demand of nearly 551,921 pairs annually, with a market value of €27.59 million in Europe.

Moreover, survey results indicated that 94% of players use gloves regularly. Around 50% purchase more than one pair per season, and a large majority express dissatisfaction with current options due to high prices and limited local availability. Despite high brand concentration of major U.S. brands, over 60% of respondents indicated a willingness to try a new European brand. In particular, a brand that offers similar performance at a lower price point. This validates the hypothesis that there is a viable and underserved niche for a Europe-based glove brand like Juuke.

RQ2: What financing options are available for startups in Austria, and which are most suitable for Juuke?

Austria offers a wide but somewhat fragmented range of funding opportunities. For Juuke, conventional venture capital is not the right match, at least not at this point. This is because most VC firms still concentrate on highly scalable, technology-heavy projects. The more realistic ways of financing at this stage are public funding programs (for instance through awfs or FFG), support from business angels, and community-based approaches such as crowdfunding.

Public grants stand out because they provide early financing without forcing founders to give up equity. Crowdfunding is also very promising for Juuke, since it not only helps raise the money needed but also brings players, clubs, and early adopters closer to the brand. Business angels could come into play at a later point, once Juuke shows clear signs of traction and manages to establish itself in the market.

Overall, the findings of this research suggest that there is a genuine and growing opportunity for American Football gloves in Europe. They also point toward a funding path for Juuke that relies less on traditional venture capital and more on a careful mix of grants, crowdfunding, and founder-driven strategies to enter and grow in this niche market.

5.2 Managerial and Academic Implications

Managerial Implications

From a business perspective, this study offers a roadmap for entrepreneurs entering underserved sports markets in Europe. The findings emphasize the importance of aligning product offerings with unmet consumer needs. In this case, a need for affordable, high-performance American Football gloves that are easily available in Europe.

Juuke and similar startups can extract the following strategic insights:

- **Target underserved segments:** Focus on amateur and semi-professional players aged 12–35, especially in countries with growing participation like Germany and Austria.
- **Use crowdfunding to validate demand:** Early engagement through community platforms can build momentum, validate pricing strategies, and attract early adopters.
- **Differentiate via local accessibility:** By addressing high import costs and inconsistent availability of U.S. brands, Juuke can secure competitive advantages in convenience and customer service.
- **Bootstrap early and apply for grants:** Founders should take advantage of Austria's public startup infrastructure while retaining control over their business during the early development phase.

These recommendations can serve other entrepreneurs navigating niche, non-tech European markets, particularly in the lifestyle, fashion, and sports industries.

Academic Implications

This study contributes to existing literature in key ways:

1. **Niche Market Strategy:** It reinforces and applies Aaker's (1996) theory of brand positioning in niche markets, demonstrating how targeted branding and unmet consumer needs can create space for new entrants.
2. **Sports Entrepreneurship in Europe:** This dissertation is one of the few studies that looks at how an American Football glove brand can be launched in Europe. By doing so, it adds a new angle to academic research and shows how sport, entrepreneurship, and regional economic development can be linked together in practice.

5.3 Limitations and Further Research

Limitations

Despite the meaningful insights generated, this study also has several limitations:

- **Sample Size and Generalizability:** While the survey reached players from multiple European countries, the sample relied on convenience and snowball sampling. As such, the findings may not fully represent all demographics or countries.
- **Scope Limited to Gloves:** The research focused exclusively on gloves and did not explore related product categories (e.g., cleats, jerseys), which may also present opportunities for growth.
- **Single Case Study:** The analysis centers on Juuke and does not compare multiple startups. This limits the ability to generalize the findings across various sports startups.
- **Short-Term Perspective:** Long-term data on consumer loyalty, crowdfunding performance, or revenue development were not available due to the early stage of the venture.

Further Research Recommendations

To expand on this study, future research should:

- **Conduct a longitudinal study** of market development and Juuke's performance. This should be done after the launch to track brand growth and customer behavior over time.

- **Broaden the sample base** to include more countries with emerging American Football markets.
- **Compare funding strategies** across different types of niche startups to better understand what determines financing success beyond industry-specific factors.
- **Study consumer loyalty:** Explore in greater depth how and why athletes switch brands and what role design, price, availability, and community presence play in loyalty formation.

5.4 Personal Reflection

Looking back, this research has helped me understand entrepreneurship in smaller, less mainstream industries much better. Working on Juuke gave me the chance to bring together theory from my studies with real business practice. It also taught me how to look at data more carefully and use it to make decisions that actually work in practice. Most importantly, I learned how to turn research into useful strategies for building a brand. These lessons will stay with me and be valuable for my future career in business and entrepreneurship.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Section 1: Introduction

Thank you all very much in participating in this survey. I wish you all a great remaining offseason and a successful and injury-free season!

Section 2: Demographic and Player Profile

1. Which country are you from?

- [open text field]

2. If you play American Football or Flag Football, which position do you play?

- Quarterback
- Center
- OL
- Running Back
- Receiver
- DL
- Linebacker
- Cornerback
- Safety
- Other

Section 3: Glove Usage Patterns

3. Do you wear Football Gloves during Training/Game Days?

- Yes
- No

4. How many pairs of Football Gloves, on average, do you buy per year (offseason and season)?

- Less than 1
- 1
- 2
- More than 2

Section 4: Brand Affiliation and Satisfaction

5. If yes, which brand do you use?

- Nike
- Adidas
- Under Armour
- Cutter
- Grip Boost
- Other

6. What factors influence your decisions to choose a particular brand?

- Quality and Performance
- Design and Style
- Brand Reputation
- Brand Loyalty
- Price and Value for money
- Availability and Accessibility

7. How satisfied are you with the current offering of American Football Gloves in terms of the following qualities? (1 = not satisfied at all, 5 = extremely satisfied):

- Style/Swag
- Price
- Availability
- Personal connection to brand
- Range of offering

Section 5: Openness to New Brands

8. Considering your preferences for American Football gloves, how open would you be to trying or purchasing from a different brand than your current favorite? Please select one of the following options:

- Very Open – I'm willing to explore and try products from different brands
- Somewhat Open – I might consider other brands, but I currently have a preferred choice
- Neutral – I don't have a strong preference and would consider various brands equally
- Somewhat Reluctant – I prefer sticking to my current favorite brand but could be persuaded to try others under certain conditions
- Very Reluctant – I am loyal to my current favorite brand and would not easily consider alternatives

9. What are reasons, why you would be willing to change from your current brand to new brands in this market? (1 = will not make me change, 5 = will definitely make me change):

- Word of Mouth
- Good Marketing Strategy
- Better Availability/Accessibility
- Better Price/Value

Section 6: Purchasing Behavior and Price Sensitivity

10. Do you personally think, that it is difficult to buy Football Gloves in Europe?

- Yes
- No

11. Do you think Football Gloves are currently too expensive?

- Yes
- No

12. What are you personally willing to pay or have already paid for Football Gloves?

- Up to 20 €
- Up to 30€
- Up to 40€

- Up to 50€
- Up to 60€
- Up to 70€
- Up to 80€
- Up to 90€
- More than 90€

13. Where do you prefer to purchase Football Gloves

- Online
- Specialty Sports Shops

Section 7: Qualitative Feedback

14. Any additional comments or suggestions regarding American football gloves in the European market?

- [open text field]

Appendix 2: Survey Results

Section 1: Introduction

Thank you all very much in participating in this survey. I wish you all a great remaining offseason and a successful and injury-free season!

Section 2: Demographic and Player Profile

1. Which country are you from?

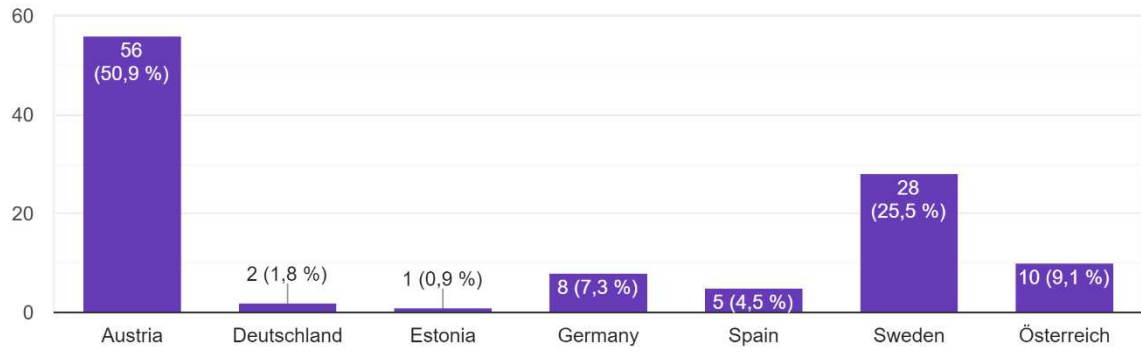


Figure 5: Demographic and Player Profile, Source: own analysis

2. If you play American Football or Flag Football, which position do you play?

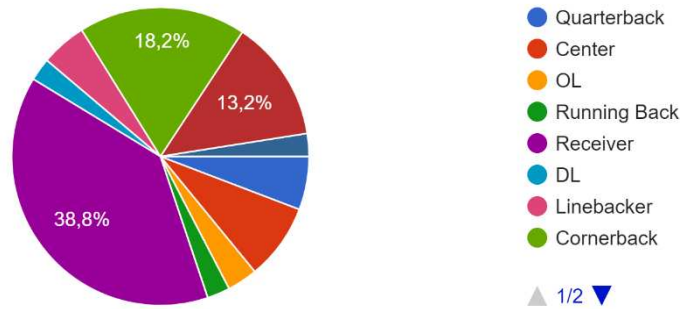


Figure 6: Player Position, Source: own analysis

Section 3: Glove Usage Patterns

3. Do you wear Football Gloves during Training/Game Days?

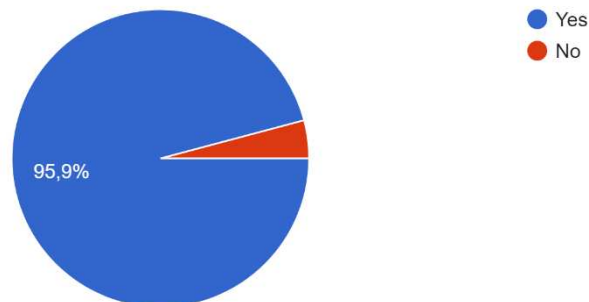


Figure 7: Glove Usage, Source: own analysis

4. How many pairs of Football Gloves, on average, do you buy per year (offseason and season)?

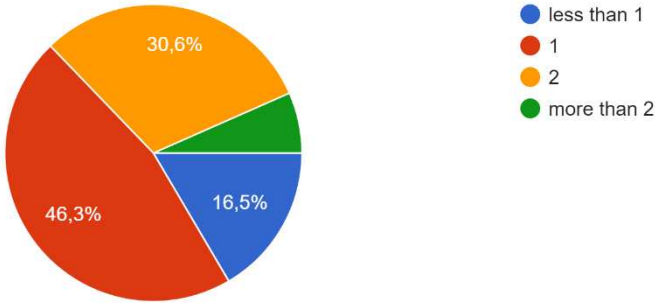


Figure 8: Number of gloves per season, Source: own analysis

Section 4: Brand Affiliation and Satisfaction

5. If yes, which brand do you use?

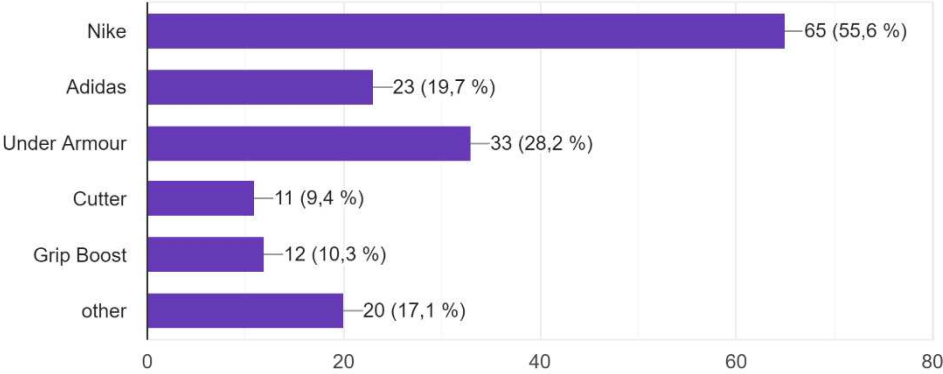


Figure 9: Brand Usage, Source: own analysis

6. What factors influence your decisions to choose a particular brand?

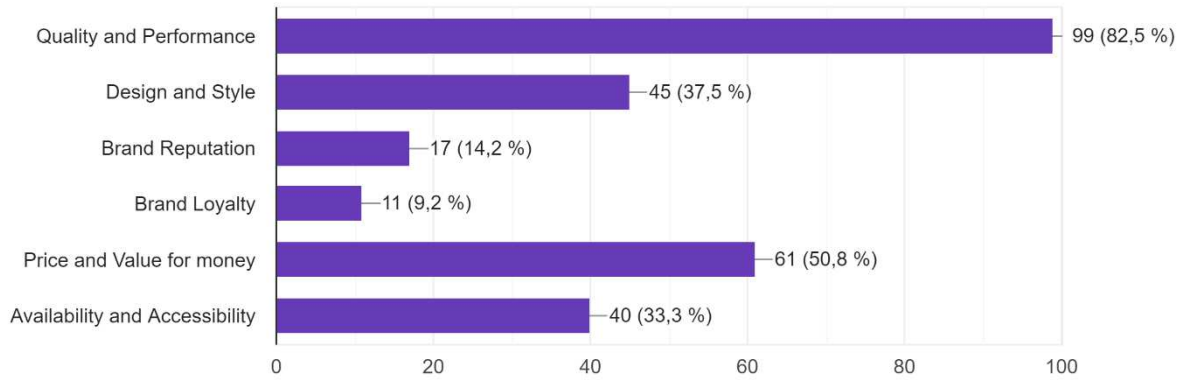


Figure 10: Factors that influence decisions, Source: own analysis

7. How satisfied are you with the current offering of American Football Gloves in terms of the following qualities? (1 = not satisfied at all, 5 = extremely satisfied):

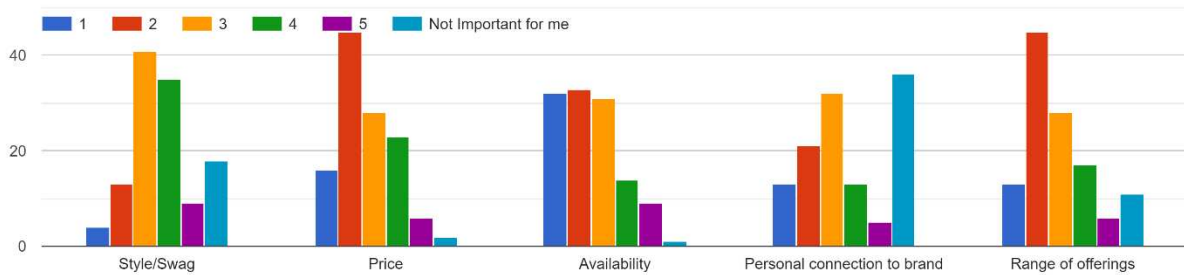


Figure 11: Satisfaction with glove qualities, Source: own analysis

Section 5: Openness to New Brands

8. Considering your preferences for American Football gloves, how open would you be to trying or purchasing from a different brand than your current favorite? Please select one of the following options:

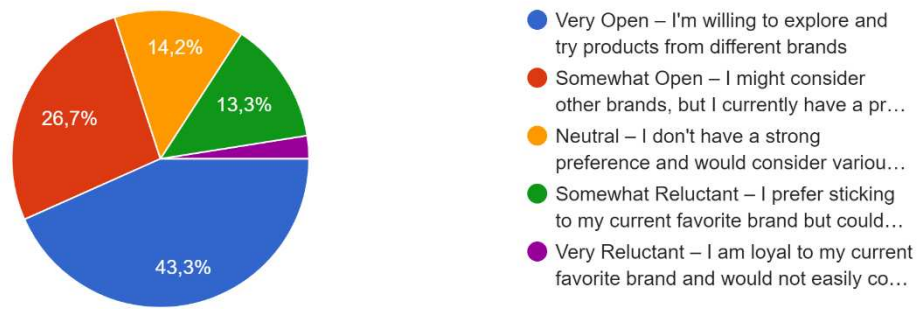


Figure 12: Openness to new brands, Source: own analysis

9. What are reasons, why you would be willing to change from your current brand to new brands in this market? (1 = will not make me change, 5 = will definitely make me change):

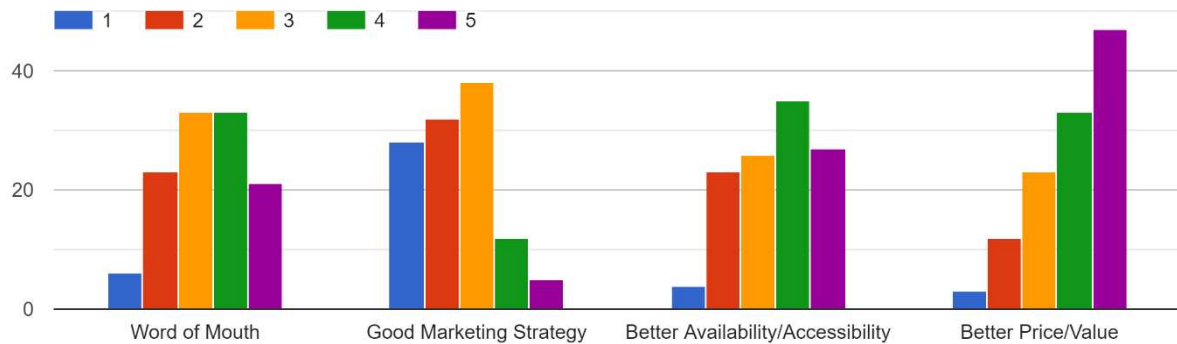


Figure 13: Reasons to change brand, Source: own analysis

Section 6: Purchasing Behavior and Price Sensitivity

10. Do you personally think, that it is difficult to buy Football Gloves in Europe?

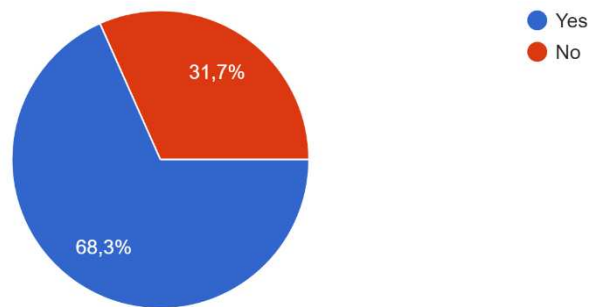


Figure 14: Opinion about the accessibility of gloves, Source: own analysis

11. Do you think Football Gloves are currently too expensive?

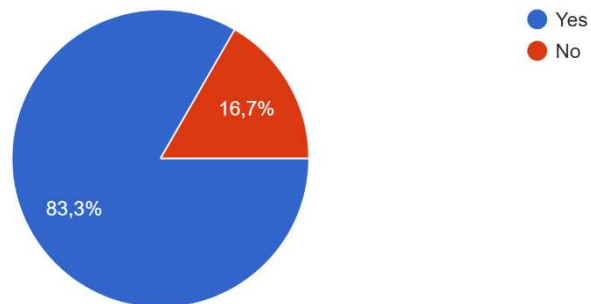


Figure 15: Opinion about glove prices, Source: own analysis

12. What are you personally willing to pay or have already paid for Football Gloves?

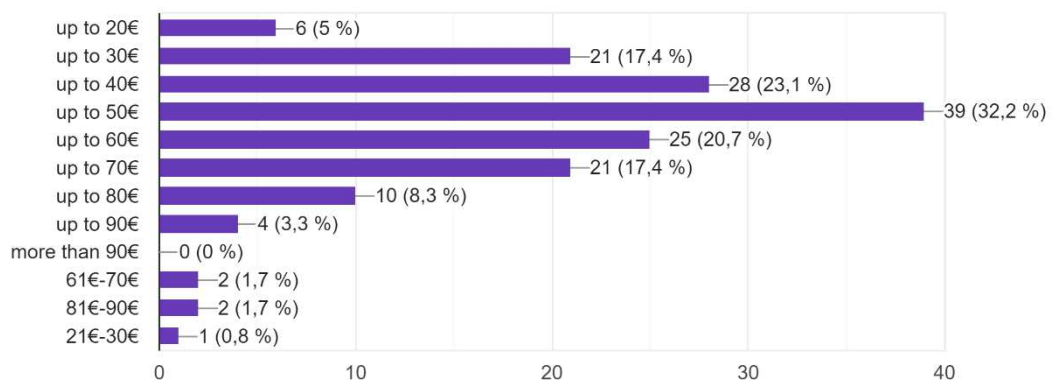


Figure 16: Willingness to pay, Source: own analysis

13. Where do you prefer to purchase Football Gloves

Where do you prefer to purchase Football Gloves?

121 Antworten

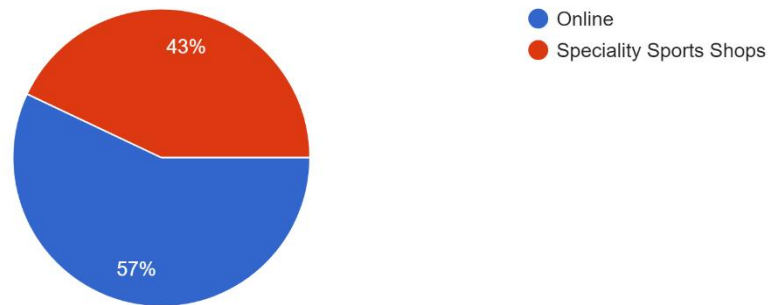


Figure 17: Preferred purchasing channel for gloves, Source: own analysis

Section 7: Qualitative Feedback

14. Any additional comments or suggestions regarding American football gloves in the European market?

The most important aspect with gloves to me is the fit, a lot of gloves today have too much stretch.
Non
I played flagfootball and played Center for 10 years but i currently play QB and do not throw with gloves, the answers comes from my time as a center.
To less gloves with cool design AND good grip
I have never bought gloves in Europe. I try to buy them in the us due to prizing and range of models
No
Too less Options, bad availability, custom gloves would be nice
0 reason the big brands shoulnt have their gloves in their european onlineshops
Women are often limited to kids gloves which usually do not have the same quality.

Figure 18: Qualitative Feedback 1, Source: own analysis

I prefer a performant glove over a glove in fancy colors. All black or all white is good enough if the glove fits, is durable and sticks for long

More suggestions, and lower price

Would make a Big difference if we had actual stores in Sweden so we could try different gloves and brands. At the moment I usually by the same brand only because i need to order them online and then i know that brand and size fit well.

Main problem is size for me (woman with small hands). Have to use youth, so few options

The grip and quality of the gloves get worse each pear like the stitching is loose or smthing just things that could be avoided

Nothing is available at local american football stores

Figure 19: Qualitative Feedback 2, Source: own analysis

Appendix 3: Documentation of Secondary Data from American Football Associations

Section 1: Email response from American Football Association Luxembourg

Hi Johannes,

I apologize and hope this reply doesn't find you too late.
Our federation is currently in a complete rebuild.

American football; around 80 active players (2 Teams in Luxembourg offering Tackle football)
Flag football; around 40 active players (3 Teams offering Flag)

We have currently 4 teams in total.

Official statistics/docs/reports don't exist.

you may check out our small website (also currently in rebuild) with the member's websites

I hope that this was helpful.
If you need any more informations, feel free to ask!

kind regards,

Figure 20: Email response from American Football Association Luxembourg confirming 120 players, Received on April 23, 2025

Section 2: Email response from Federação Portuguesa de Futebol Americano

Hello Johannes,
Thank you for your email.
Here's the info you asked:
Season 2023/24

- Flag **Football**: 111
- Tackle: 375

Season 2024/24

- Flag **Football**: 208
- Tackle: 360

Next season we expect another major increase of Flag **Football** players (+80%-100%), as we are currently establishing new teams across the country. The number of tackle **football** players shall remain the same.

Best regards,

Figure 21: Email response from Federação Portuguesa de Futebol Americano confirming 568 players, Received on March 19, 2025

Section 3: Email response from American Football Bund Österreich (Austria)

Lieber Herr Prändl!

Wir haben ca. 5000 aktive SpielerInnen in Österreich.

Liebe Grüße,
Max

Figure 22: Email response from American Football Bund Österreich confirming 5.000 players, Received on March 28, 2025

Section 4: Email response from Swiss American Football

Servus Johannes

Ich habe Dein Ansuchen betreffend Zahlen weitergeleitet bekommen und werde versuchen dir die notwendigen Infos für deine Master Thesis zu liefern.

Generell sieht es so aus das Tackle mit Rückgängen zu tun hat, während sich Flag enormer Popularität und Zuwachsraten erfreut.

Ich möchte dich darauf hinweisen das diese Daten vertraulich sind und nur im Rahmen einer anonymisierten Publikation ausschliesslich in deiner Master Thesis veröffentlicht werden dürfen.

Wünsche Dir viel Erfolg und bin dankbar für eine kurze Bestätigung das dies für Dich so in Ordnung ist.

Beste Grüsse

Figure 23: Email response from Swiss American Football confirming 2.830 players, Received on March 20, 2025

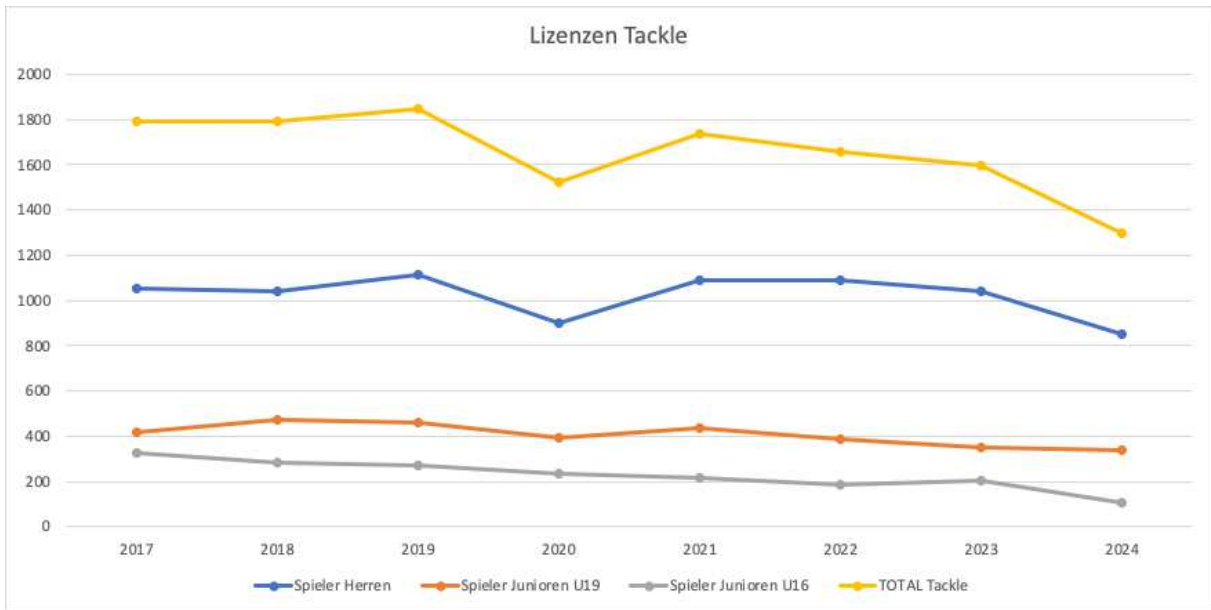


Figure 24: 1300 American Football Players in Switzerland

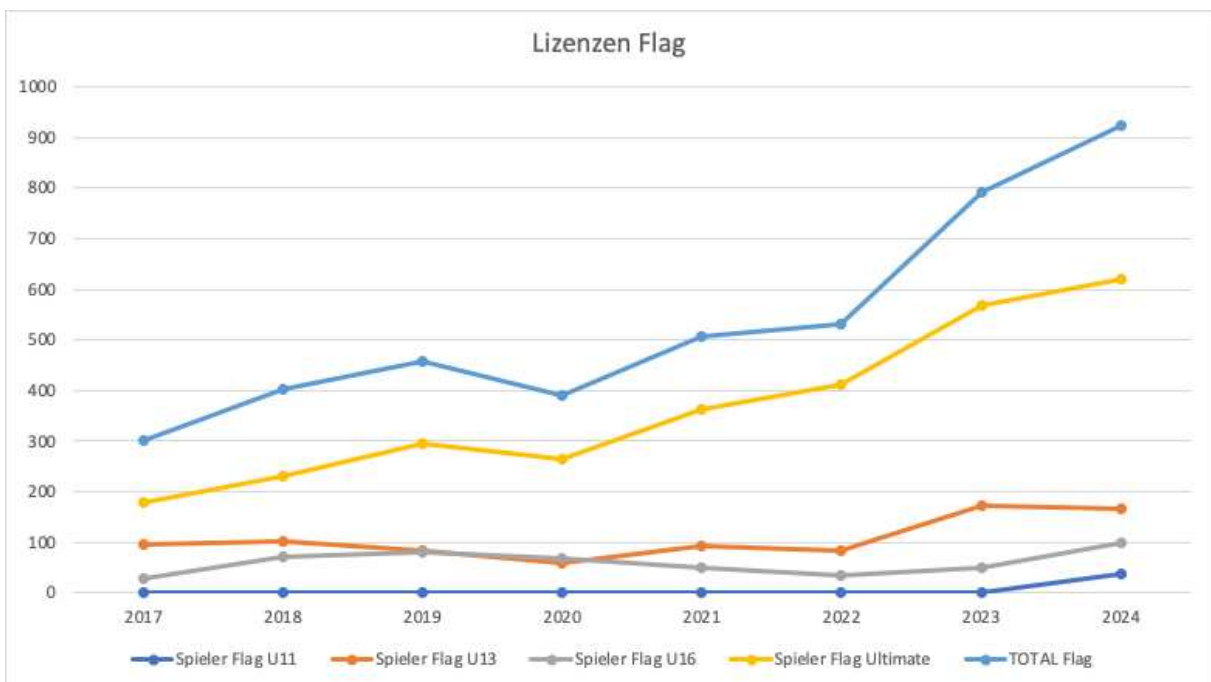


Figure 25: 1530 Flag Football Players in Switzerland

Section 5: Email response from Federazione Italiana di American Football

Dear Mr. Johannes Prändl,

we would like to inform you that in 2024 the athletes registered with our Federation were 4,091, while at the moment we have 3,754.

Best Regards

Ufficio Tesseramenti FIDAF

Figure 26: Email response from the Italian American Football Federation confirming 3.754 players, Received on September 1, 2025

Section 6: Instagram Message Response from American Football Verband Deutschland (Germany) Ambassador



Figure 27: Instagram Message response from American Football Verband Deutschland Ambassador confirming 80.000 players, Received on April 25, 2025

Section 7: Email response from Norway American Football

Hi Johannes,

At this moment, I would estimate that we have between 150-200 flag football players in the country.

The majority of them are located at one middle school, located in Førde. Outside of that, we have few currently active flag football clubs, with participants ranging in age from 9 to adults.

The remaining bulk of players comes from members of the men's and women's national teams.

Regarding American football we reported slightly over 1500 total active members last year. Flag football players are included in this number, so I would say that there are approximately 1300-1350 tackle football players.

The following screenshot is taken from Norway's Sports Federation's (NIF – Norges Idrettsforbund) electronic reporting system. These number's reflect the number of active players from last year.

Figure 28: Email response from Norway American Football confirming around 1.675 players, Received on August 19, 2025

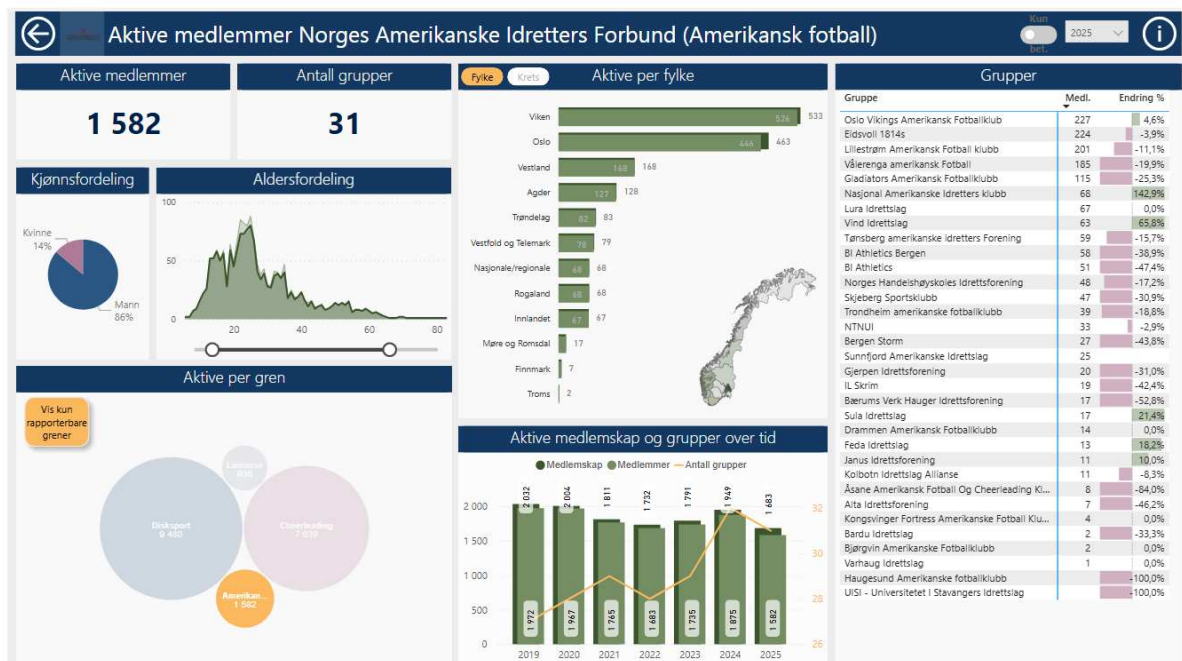


Figure 29: More than 1.500 American Football Players in Norway Received on August 19, 2025