

Do football players act sustainably? An explorative study focusing on opportunities and limits of sustainable consumption and disposal of football boots

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Abstract: Football is by far the most popular sport in the world. To pursue this passion, players need the right equipment. The most fundamental utensils needed are football boots. Which football boots are the right ones, every player decides for himself. This study aims to investigate how sustainable is such a

football boot from consumption to disposal. Furthermore, the aim of this study is to identify if the idea of sustainability in general has already become established in football. The theoretical background is set by the scientific fields of sports, fast fashion and sustainable consumption. An explorative survey of football players of two amateur football clubs in Southern Germany was executed to generate an overview on purchasing and disposing behaviour concerning football boots. Results show, that players of both football clubs are not very sustainably oriented. The vast majority dispose of their football boots in the trash rather choosing sustainable options. Similarly, not enough attention is paid to environmentally friendly aspects such as sustainable packaging or ecological material when buying. Most players hardly pay attention to these criteria. They pay more attention to comfort criteria such as appearance or fit. This is also reflected in the respondents' prioritization of sustainability. However, the majority of both clubs ensure a longer product life cycle through care and by using their foot-ball boots for a long time.

Keywords: Football Boots, Football Players, Football, Sports, Sustainable Consumption, Sustainability
JEL classification: L83, Q56, D12

1. Introduction

Football is by far the most popular sport in the world. In Germany alone, more than 7 million people are active members of a football club (Statistista, 2019). To pursue this passion, players need the right equipment. The most fundamental utensils needed are football boots. Which football boots are the right ones, every player decides for himself. This study aims to investigate how sustainable is such a football boot from consumption to disposal. Furthermore, the aim of this study is to identify if the idea of sustainability in general has already become established in football.

In the literature review (chapter 2.) first the focus and the method of the literature review are presented (chapter 2.1.), then findings in the scientific fields sport and fast fashion (chapter 2.2.) and sustainable consumption (chapter 2.3.) are shown and the research gap and the research questions are derived (chapter 2.4.). In the following chapter (3.) the applied method of the exploratory survey is described. The results presented in the next chapter (4.) follow the structure in the literature review and are presented for sport and fast fashion (chapter 4.1.) and sustainable consumption (chapter 4.2.). Finally, a conclusion is given (chapter 5.) with a discussion (chapter 5.1.), limitations and future research (chapter 5.2.).

2. Literature review

2.1. Focus and method of the literature review

In a first step a literature research is chosen to create a basis of understanding as well as identifying research gaps for the formation of this study (Kondratjuk et al., 2022). The literature review integrates the study into the state of research. It encompasses the indexing and processing of the findings documented in literature on the scientific fields of sport and fast fashion and sustainable consumption (Snyder 2019; Eco 2015). The focus of the literature review is on the operationalization of relevant variables for the empirical investigation as well as on the development of explanatory approaches.

2.2. Sports and fast fashion

The development and spread of new sports, the participation of all population groups and people of all ages, and the integration of new sports into society lead to a constant increase in the importance of sport in everyday life. Due to this development, it can be said that a broader understanding of sports has emerged. Exercise and sporting activity can also take place outside sports clubs and gyms. In the health care system, people are also advised to engage in sports in order to promote, maintain or even restore their health (Hottenrott et al., 2017). This development has given rise to two different approaches in sports science. On the one hand, there is the scientific study of organized sport, which is practiced according to rules and the principle of competition. In this field, research is done in terms of high performance and physical limits. These types of sports are not always beneficial to health. However, the health-enhancing physical activities (HEPA) are also being researched. In this area, research is conducted into the general lack of physical activity in society. The resulting studies are intended to provide insights into the general health of the population (Rütten, 2017).

When researching the sport of football, the focus is on high-performance sports, the professional area. Above all, training methods are researched. Over all the limits of development in the areas of speed, endurance and strength are researched (Raabe et al., 2020). In order to pursue their passion, football players need the right equipment. The most fundamental utensils needed are the right football boots. Which football boots are the right ones, every player decides for himself.

Flexibility and supply chains of the textile industry are repeatedly put to the test in the so-called "fast fashion" industry. Fast fashion is about the fast and effective integration of emerging trends into the current range of goods (Kovács-Vajkai & Ágnes, 2020). Manufacturers of football boots are also captured in this fast-fashion cycle. Since the first introduction of the football boots, in 1949, there have been approximately 6500 different variants of football boots until today (Football boots DB, 2020).

The textile industry is a very dynamic branch of industry, which is continuously oriented to demand and therefore has to act flexibly (Umam & Sommanawat, 2019). The production of clothing and textile goods is constantly monitored for productivity and quality. Cost reduction potentials are to be discussed in order to make the production as economical as possible (Bullón et al., 2017). With remarkably large supply chains, the textile industry is a major beneficiary of globalization. The ongoing removal of trade barriers has created many opportunities for the textile industry. The flow of goods and the outsourcing of production sites have become less complicated and thus a big factor in terms of cost reduction potential (Książak, 2016).

2.3. Sustainable consumption

In economic science one assumes a rational and materially profit-oriented action of humans, the so-called "homo oeconomicus". This is understood as a standard assumption. Behavioural economics is concerned with deviations from this assumption in order to analyse them. In this way, insights are gained into human behaviour, for example in purchasing decisions. Humans usually do not decide rationally only. Rarely do they include all the information given to them in their decision-making process, and they do not decide based on logic alone. Both in economic areas and in everyday life, humans include emotions, norms and fairness rules in their decision-making process. Thus, there is a link between economics, sociology, psychology and neuroscience (Scheidegger, 2018). Modern behavioural economics, however, cannot be completely separated from the standard assumption of "homo

oeconomicus", but it is a natural further development, which is very successful and represented in many areas of the economy (Dittrich, 2019).

The issue of sustainability and environmental awareness plays a significant role in the textile industry. The amount of textile waste generated in the production of textiles, fibers and garments is a cause for concern. Likewise, a lot of toxic dyes are used in the production process. There is overproduction, depletion of natural resources and water pollution. These processes make the textile industry the second largest environmental polluter after the oil industry (Stringer et al., 2020). The clothing industry is currently one of the least sustainable industries around the world. Clothing industry companies are in favour of 10% of global carbon emissions and additional damage caused by the processes in textile production, such as bleaching, rinsing, dyeing and mercerizing, harm the environment. Furthermore, by shortening the life cycle of clothing, the fashion industry has an enormous waste disposal problem of old clothes. The accelerating fashion cycle negatively impacts social sustainability as supply chain exhaustion continues to increase and as a result, the working conditions in the cheap production facilities become worse (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). The key to achieve social and environmental sustainability in the clothing industry is to increase the useful life of clothing (Maguire & Fahy, 2022).

Companies and non-profit enterprises, such as associations, federations, municipalities or foundations have a great influence on society and can thus contribute significantly to an improvement by promoting sustainability. However, these companies and non-profits are tied to opportunities for action and resources, so that new constellations and cooperation between society, business, politics and science are required to achieve major progress (Nölting, 2015). Especially football clubs have the opportunity to influence positively society's behaviour. Through this football clubs have a social responsibility towards society. The result is that football clubs also serve as role models in the area of sustainability in order to fulfil their social responsibility. (Walzel & Schubert 2018).

2.4. Research gap and research questions (RQs)

Several studies focus on the behavioural response of customers to sustainable marketing and innovation activities in the retail sector (e.g. Aigner et al., 2019; Lestari & Fitriani, 2021; Tarigan et al., 2021). Only few studies focus on the sports textile segment. This study contributes to the field of research in sustainable consumption by analysing the behaviour of football players and their response in the context of purchasing (sustainable) and disposing football boots. The following research-guiding questions are the basis for the design of a quantitative customer survey and data analysis:

RQ1: Do football players think about sustainability when buying football boots?

RQ2: What makes football boots sustainable?

RQ3: Do football players care for their football boots and if yes how?

3. Methods

An exploratory survey of football players in Southern Germany is used to explore new insights. It provides an overview of their purchasing behaviour. In order to be able to discuss the possibilities and limits of sustainable consumption and disposal of football boots, a questionnaire was completed via an online survey by the men's teams of Football Club A and Football Club B located in Southern Germany. Access to the questionnaire was provided digitally via a link leading to the online survey. The link of

the online survey was in addition shared and posted via *WhatsApp*. The survey was assembled in multiple choice questions and questions with open fields for own answers. The use of mixed-mode surveys for data collection provides data for the empirics (Fielding, 2012; Timans et al., 2019).

The survey was conducted between June 09, 2020 and June 12, 2020. 59 players took part in the survey. Of these, 32 players (54 percent) were from Football Club A and 27 players (46 percent) from Football Club B. Answers were sampled virtually because privacy should be provided for getting honest answers. For the quality of the samples, honest answers were essential for the real reflection of the football players' behaviour. Questions that would have asked directly about the football players' sustainable behaviour could have led to obligated answer choices of how the c football players should or wants to behave. Descriptive statistical procedures are used for data analysis and interpretation.

4. Results

4.1. Results sports and fast fashion

In the online survey the players were asked to indicate how often they normally play football during the week. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was no amateur football at this time. The players of Football Club A answered this question as follows: 10 percent of the players play football once a week, another 10 percent play football twice a week, the clear majority, with almost 70 percent plays football three times a week and the last 10 percent play football more than three times a week. Among the Football Club B respondents, football is played more often. The result of the Football Club B, looks as follows: None of the respondents play football only once a week, 7,5 percent of the respondents stated that they play football twice a week, 81,5 percent stated that they play football three times a week and the remaining 11 percent play football more than three times a week (see Figure 1):

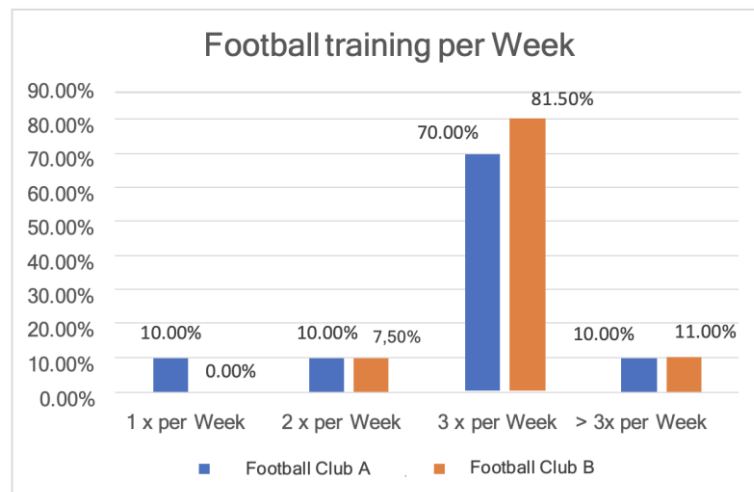


Figure 1. Football training per week
Own source (2024)

By indicating how often football is played per week, it can be seen that even in the amateur sector, the sport of football is taken seriously by almost everyone and is played with an enormous passion. As already mentioned in the professional area there is an increased search for maximum performance and

limits, it can also be seen in the amateur area that the athletes also want to achieve their maximum performance and spend a lot of time on it. The football players of the two clubs were asked how important sustainable disposal and sustainable consumption of football boots is for them. Assessment criteria were applied here (see Figure 2):

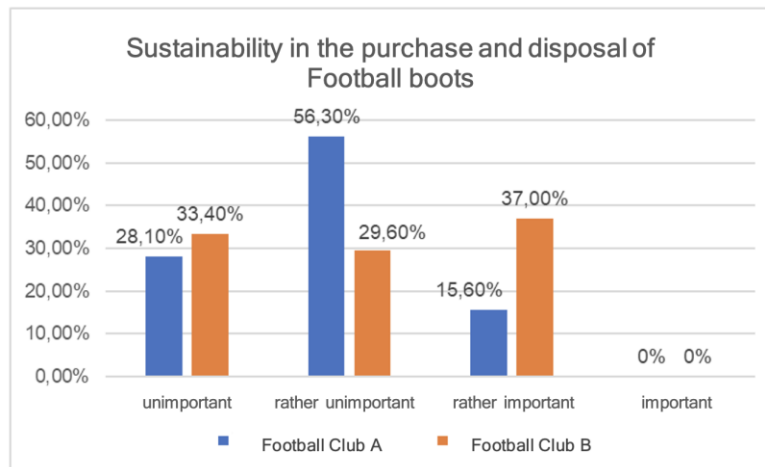


Figure 2. Importance of sustainability in the purchase and disposal of football boots
Own source (2024)

At both Football Club A and Football Club B there is not a single player who mentions that sustainability aspects are very important. Likewise, around a third of the respondents at both clubs find sustainability aspects unimportant. The players at Football Club B rate this question as "rather important" with 37 percent and as "rather unimportant" with 29.6 percent, while Football Club A rates the relevance of sustainability aspects as rather unimportant with 56.3 percent and holds the opinion "rather important" with only 15.6 percent. That means that the players of Football Club B pay a little more attention to the issue of sustainability than the players of Football Club A, yet both clubs are not sufficiently sustainability-oriented. Furthermore, the criteria according to which the respondents complete their purchase of the football boots are investigated (see Figure 3):

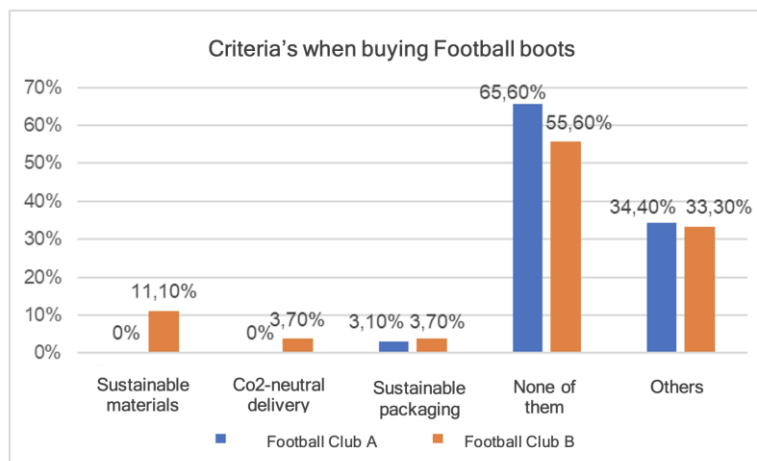


Figure 3. Purchasing criteria
Own source (2024)

As it can be seen not a single person surveyed at Football Club A pays attention to ecological materials and CO2-neutral delivery of the football boot. Only 3.1 percent of the players attach importance to sustainable packaging of their product. With 65.6 percent of the votes and thus the vast majority do not pay attention to any of the listed options. A further 34.4 percent pay attention to other criteria. Football Club B again reveals some commonalities. The majority of the players surveyed, with 55.6 percent of all votes, do not pay attention to any of the given answer options. In comparison to Football Club A, 11.1 percent of the players here pay attention to ecological materials and 3.7 percent each to sustainable packaging and CO2-neutral delivery. Another 33.3 percent prefer alternative criteria. This sub-set of the survey leads to the conclusion that consumers of football boots at the above-mentioned clubs pay little attention to the sustainability of the football boots. For the most part, the environmental aspect is not included in the purchase decision at either club.

4.2. Results sustainable consumption

Survey factors in this chapter are care of football boots and reacquisition span as well as place of purchase and disposal. The question of what is important to the respondents when buying football boots is answered as follow: Of the 32 Football Club A footballers surveyed, around 65 percent showed no interest in sustainable options such as recycled leather or sustainable packaging when buying their football boots. The remaining 35 percent indicated important criteria for you as an answer. The most important criterion for the Football Club A footballers was fit and comfort. Sporadically it was also indicated that the boots should be made of leather, preferably black leather. One person indicated a specific model, the Nike Tiempo in boot size 44, as a selection criterion for the purchase.

The responding players of Football Club B have a similar opinion on this question. Of the 27 respondents, here too more than half, 55.6 percent have no interest in sustainable options when buying football boots. Here, however, it was important to 11 percent of respondents that the boots be made of recycled leather. A third also responded with other criteria that are important to you. Here it is striking that the appearance of the boots, is the most important purchase criterion. The fit is in second place. The price, on the other hand, is the least important criterion. So it can be concluded, for the textile industry, that appearance and the fit of the football boots are the most important criteria when buying football boots, this is also evident in the following graphs (Figure 4 and Figure 5):

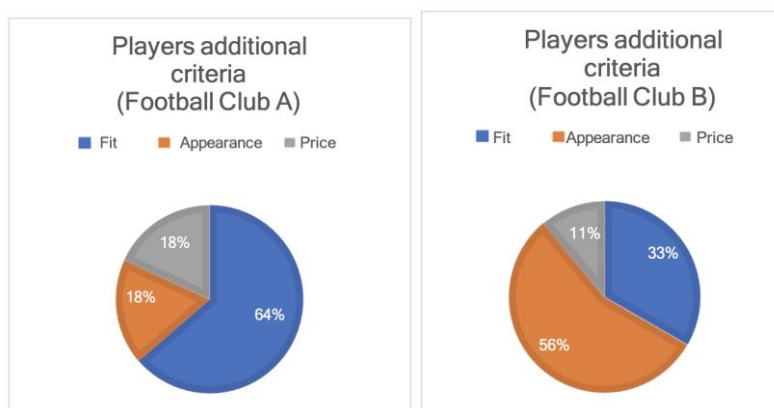


Figure 4 and figure 5. Additional purchasing criteria
Own source (2024)

The next component of the questionnaire shows the extent to which the respondents players of both clubs care for their football boots (see Figure 6):

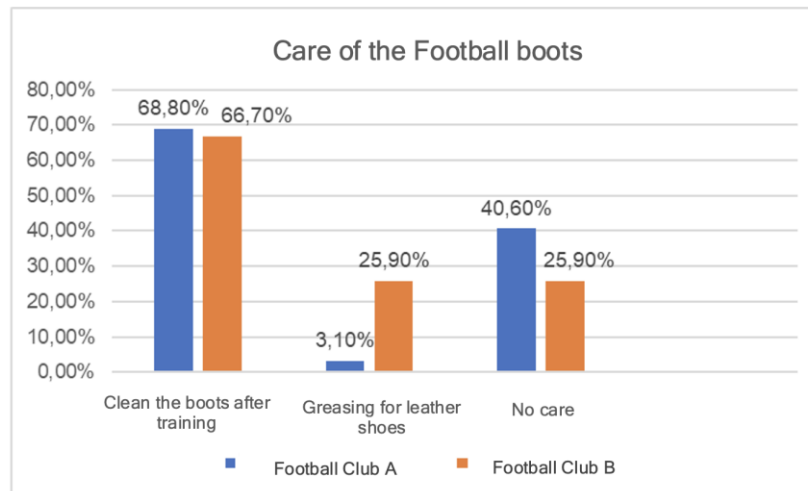


Figure 6. Care of the football boots
Own source (2024)

At Football Club A, an absolute majority of 68.8 percent clean their football boots after use. 40.6 percent of the players do not care for their football boots at all and only a good three percent grease them.

At Football Club B, too, the majority of players (66.7 percent) clean their football boots after use. In comparison to Football Club A, 25.9 percent of the players' football boots are not cleaned at all and the same percentage is greased.

From this evaluation, it can be determined that both clubs wash the majority of their football boots at least after use. At Football Club A, some of the players do not clean their football boots regularly and only a vanishingly small percentage of the players grease them. In comparison, Football Club B pays a little more attention to boot care. Successful care of the football boots extends the product life cycle and thus the football boots are repurchased at longer intervals, which in the long run leads to a saving of resources. In this respect, Football Club B takes a more sustainable approach than Football Club A.

In the context of sustainable consumption, findings are also made from the reacquisition period. Various options were given for answering, of which only one could be checked (Figure 7).

Three quarters of those surveyed at Football Club A only buy new football boots when they are broken and no longer functional. 15.6 percent purchase them again after one season and 3.1 percent every six months. Another 6.3 percent buy their football boots on a whim.

At Football Club B, around 60 percent of players do not bother with a new purchase of their football boots until they are broken. 22.2 percent buy them on a whim, 11.1 percent every six months and 7.4 percent every season.

Football Club A performs significantly better than Football Club B in the area of re-purchasing their football boots, as they tend to wear their football boots longer. By wearing them longer, they are less likely to buy new ones, which in turn would minimize the waste of resources in the long run. Likewise, CO2 emissions are reduced since the purchase of football boots involves transportation.

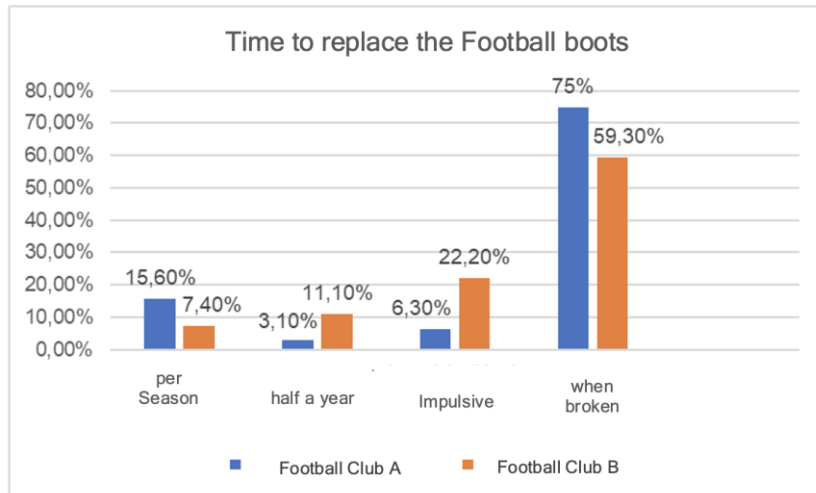


Figure 7. Reacquisition period
Own source (2024)

In the survey, respondents were then asked to comment on the latter issue. Based on the place of purchase, some insights are gained. Here, the choice between buying in a sports store and buying online was listed.

At Football Club A, 65.6 percent of all respondents chose online shopping, while only 34.4 percent went to the sports store.

At Football Club B, on the other hand, the picture is different. At 66.7 percent, most players prefer to go to the sports store. Only 33.3 percent of respondents reach for the online option.

As a result, the players of Football Club B choose the more sustainable way of purchasing their football boots than Football Club A, as both towns have such a sports store. This fact makes online shopping the more environmentally damaging option, as transport routes are associated with high emissions.

Within the scope of the survey, the different ways of disposal of football boots of the players of both clubs are shown (Figure 8 and Figure 9):

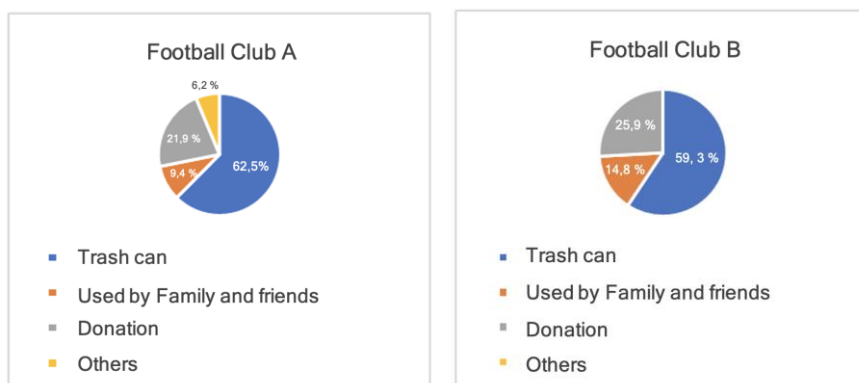


Figure 8 and Figure 9. Disposal of football boots
Own source (2024)

At Football Club A, 62.5 percent - well over half of all votes - players' football boots are disposed of in the waste garbage can. Only 21.9 percent of respondents choose the disposal route through donation options such as a used clothing container. Even lower, at 9.4 percent, is the proportion of respondents who give away their football boots to family or friends. As an alternative to the given choices, players do not dispose of their football boots at all and put them in the basement.

Very similar results of the evaluation can be seen at Football Club B. As with Football Club A, with 59.3 percent of the votes, more than half of the players dispose of their football boots in the trash can. Furthermore, 25.9 percent choose the disposal method of donation and 14.8 percent give away their football boots to friends or family after use.

The results of this survey show that for the most part, both clubs do not pay attention to sustainable disposal of football boots. However, sustainable disposal is not completely disregarded. A good third of the players at Football Club A and around 41 percent of the players at Football Club B dispose of their football boots in a sustainable manner. This creates a product cycle, which means that less waste is produced and fewer resources need to be consumed.

In terms of RQ1, the survey results indicate that football players are less concerned with sustainable aspects when buying football boots. However, the survey results indicate that good care of football boots, a long reacquisition period of football boots and not only the right disposal but also a reuse/donation make football boots more sustainable (RQ2). Concerning RQ3, the survey results indicate that football players care for their football boots. Nevertheless, the awareness of sustainability of the football players of both clubs is expandable.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

Through the findings of the study, it can be said that the football players of Football Club A and Football Club B are not very sustainably oriented. This is reflected in their purchasing and their disposal behaviour. Most players dispose of their football boots in the trash can instead of choosing sustainable options. Similarly, not enough attention is paid to environmentally friendly aspects such as sustainable packaging or ecological material when buying (RQ2). Most hardly pay attention to these criteria. They pay more attention to comfort criteria such as appearance or fit. This is also reflected in the respondents' prioritization of sustainability (zero vote for "very important") (RQ1). However, the majority of the football players of both clubs ensure a longer product life cycle through care and by using their football boots for a long time ("until they break") (RQ3). Football Club B uses their football boots more often per week than Football Club A and is also somewhat more sustainability oriented. Thus, with increasing use of the football boots, sustainability awareness increases (RQ3).

5.2. Limitations and future research

Through this study possibilities and limits of sustainable purchasing, sustainable care and sustainable disposal of football boots at two amateur football clubs were identified and analysed. Through a written survey, which was conducted online, the participation of the respondents was smooth despite the current COVID-19 situation. Only male participants were interviewed, since the proportion of women in general in football is not very large. Thus, a more general collection of data would be possible (adding more

players as well as groups/clubs, including female football players). It was amazing to see how many players from both clubs completely left out the topic of sustainability. On the other hand, it was impressive to see that most players of both clubs contribute a lot in the area of product life cycle of football boots.

Based on the numerous findings gained in this study, a certain reluctance and disinterest on the part of many respondents can be identified with regard to the topic of sustainability. It can be assumed that in the future, the topic of sustainability will also become more relevant in the sports industry especially in the professional sports sector. Examples of sustainability activities of professional football clubs already exist (e.g. Sport-Club Freiburg e. V., 2023; AC Milan, 2021). This also prompts to take a closer look at the entire sportswear industry to promote sustainable processes, for example in the case of jerseys or goalkeeper gloves but also selecting other sportswear. Finally comparing the preliminary results of the study with new results in a couple of years could display a development.

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**Ponašaju li se nogometaši održivo?
Istraživačka studija usmjerena na mogućnosti i ograničenja održive
potrošnje i odlaganja nogometnih kopački**

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Sažetak: Nogomet je daleko najpopularniji sport na svijetu. Kako bi se bavili ovom strašću, igračima je potrebna odgovarajuća oprema. Najosnovniji dio opreme su nogometne kopačke. Koje su kopačke "prave", odlučuje svaki igrač za sebe. Cilj ove studije je istražiti koliko su takve nogometne kopačke održive – od kupnje do odlaganja. Nadalje, cilj studije je utvrditi je li se općenito ideja održivosti već ukorijenila u nogometu. Teorijska podloga studije temelji se na znanstvenim područjima sporta, brze

mode i održive potrošnje. Provedeno je istraživanje putem anketnog upitnika među nogometašima dvaju amaterskih nogometnih klubova iz južne Njemačke kako bi se dobio uvid u ponašanje prilikom kupnje i odlaganja nogometnih kopački. Rezultati pokazuju da igrači iz oba kluba nisu izrazito orijentirani prema održivosti. Velika većina kopačke jednostavno baca u smeće, umjesto da odabere održive načine odlaganja. Također, prilikom kupnje ne pridaje se dovoljno pažnje aspektima okolišne prihvatljivosti poput održivog pakiranja ili ekoloških materijala – većina igrača jedva obraća pažnju na te kriterije. Umjesto toga, važniji su im kriteriji udobnosti poput izgleda ili pristajanja. To se odražava i u prioritetima koje ispitanici daju održivosti. Ipak, većina igrača iz oba kluba produljuje životni vijek proizvoda brigom o kopačkama i njihovim dugotrajnim korištenjem.

Ključne riječi: nogometne kopačke, nogomet, održivost, održiva potrošnja

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