



## Press Release

### European soccer increasingly popular in the USA

**Tübingen sports economists survey US citizens – international soccer telecasts are popular, particularly among the younger generation and the Spanish-speaking audience**

**Dr. Karl Guido Rijkhoek**  
Director

**Antje Karbe**  
Press Officer

Phone +49 7071 29-76788  
+49 7071 29-76789

Fax +49 7071 29-5566  
karl.rijkhoek[at]uni-tuebingen.de  
antje.karbe[at]uni-tuebingen.de

[www.uni-tuebingen.de/aktuell](http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/aktuell)

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European professional soccer has a growing fan base also in the USA: “A representative survey reveals that almost fifty percent of US citizens have at least a basic interest in soccer games,” say Professor Tim Pawlowski and Georgios Nalbantis from the University of Tübingen. Among the most popular clubs in the USA are the two English clubs Manchester United and Chelsea FC as well as the two Spanish clubs FC Barcelona and Real Madrid.

The sports economists from Tübingen analyzed the interest of US citizens in European soccer competitions and Major League Soccer (MLS), the highest level soccer league in the USA and Canada, for the very first time. They focused on factors, which affect the demand for soccer telecasts. Based on their estimations, the researchers were able, amongst others, to derive a preference ranking of the most popular international soccer competitions for the American TV audience.

Ever since the USA was nominated as the host country for FIFA’s Soccer World Cup in 1994, the interest in soccer has grown in the country. “This is well-known,” say the experts, “and is partly reflected in the numbers of people tuning in to soccer games on TV. Reported audience figures of English Premier League games, for example, have now exceeded those of regular season games of the National Hockey League (NHL), the top North American ice hockey league. However, they continue to lag far behind the leading sports in North America, i.e. American football, basketball and baseball.

The Tübingen study now surveys figures on different aspects of the American soccer market in detail for the first time. A US-wide representative sample of more than 6,500 people was used to gather the extensive data. A screen-out question at the beginning of the surveys enabled the experts to focus on individuals, who indicated at least a basic interest in soccer. “These were almost 50 percent in both survey rounds – a share

far higher than had been expected for the US market, which is dominated by the three major sports,” the researchers stated.

The survey participants were asked, amongst others, about their favorite soccer competitions. Among the seven competitions, the greatest interest was indicated for the English Premier League, followed by the UEFA Champions League, the American MLS and the Spanish La Liga. According to this ranking, the German Bundesliga is in position five ahead of the Italian Serie A and the French Ligue 1. The highest share of people interested in European soccer clubs were found in the states of California and New York. Roughly 3.5 percent of the soccer interested individuals mentioned Bayern Munich as their favorite club. This means that Bayern Munich is one of the top 10 most popular European and North American soccer teams in the USA; the list is headed by England’s Manchester United, followed by Spain’s FC Barcelona.

The focus of the study was put on exploring factors, which affect the demand for international soccer telecasts. It emerged that soccer fans from an MLS city as well as the younger generation had on average a greater interest in international soccer games. Moreover, it was found that the Spanish-speaking population occupies a disproportionately important position among soccer fans. “This might explain why games played by Bayer Leverkusen with the Mexican star Javier Hernández Balcázar (aka Chicharito) were very popular in the 2015/2016 season,” say the sports economists. The study also confirms for the first time empirically that “competitive balance” in soccer competitions plays a significant role in the USA. Leagues offering close championship races are perceived as being exciting and attract more spectators than competitions dominated by just few clubs.

The study benefited from a João Havelange Research Scholarship with which FIFA supports independent research projects on soccer. The study’s findings have been published as a book.

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**Contact details:**

Georgios Nalbantis  
University of Tübingen  
Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences  
Department of Sport Economics, Sport Management and Media Research  
Phone: +49 7071 29-76545  
georgios.nalbantis@uni-tuebingen.de

Prof. Dr. Tim Pawlowski  
University of Tübingen  
Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences  
Head of the Department of Sport Economics, Sport Management and Media Research  
Phone: +49 7071 29-76544  
tim.pawlowski@uni-tuebingen.de