

AMSTERDAM ENTREPRENEURSHIP CASES:



Author:

Joris Ebbers

Associate professor Entrepreneurship and Innovation

University of Amsterdam

December 1, 2017

Introduction

"I think it [FootMapp] is interesting because we have objective data. It is linked to the video we generate from every match and it has a lot of tools to automatically detect situations we consider interesting. This makes it easy to show the players what we want to improve. And they learn from the matches they played."

Pablo Manzanet Montford, assistant coach Villarreal FC

Metrica Sports provides tactical analysis tools to improve the performance of football – or soccer – players through easy-to-use, customer centered software for data and video analysis. Their core product is the software FootMapp, which provides clubs with detection of key moments or movements using pattern recognition technology and original video of matches with overlaid annotated visualizations. The tool can be tailored for each customer to detect any situation, especially those that are hard for the human eye to notice. FootMapp can plot and visualize the relevant information in a fast, flexible and easy way, which improves the interaction between coaches and trainers with their players by showing them hard facts in a visual and intuitive way directly connected to the video.

At the time of writing (October 2017) Metrica Sports has 6 full time employees: 4 software developers, responsible for further building the tactical analysis tool, 1 operations manager, responsible for the tracking of the sports players, and 1 sales / business developer. In addition, they have over 30 contractors that get paid by the hour through an employment agency. Most of these contractors are students that want to make some extra money next to these studies. Metrica Sports currently focuses its attention and resources on targeting the football market. Their annual revenue is about €500.000. Although valuing an early stage company is difficult, investors value it around €6 to €12 million.

Background of the founders

Metrica Sports has three founders. First, Ruben Saavedra (Chief Executive Officer), born in 1981, from Barcelona, Spain. As the CEO, he is responsible for all business-related matters, including sales. Saavedra has a Bachelor degree in biotechnology from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, a Master degree, worked three years in the UK in pharmaceutical companies, and started a PhD in Neuroscience at the University of Amsterdam. He was close to completing his PhD when he founded Metrica Sports. He does not have an intention to complete his PhD dissertation after having experienced founding his own company.

Saavedra comes from an entrepreneurial family. His father, like many immigrants from the south of Spain at the time, started working in Barcelona while still a teenager and now owns his own successful company selling frozen fish to restaurants and employing about 10 people. Although Saavedra never had an intention to become an entrepreneur himself, the option of starting his own company crossed his path when he discussed his passion for football with his friend (and what would turn out to be his cofounder) Bruno Dagnino: “We saw an opportunity of doing things that we liked. Basically, that’s how we started”.

The second founder is Bruno Dagnino (Chief Technology Officer), born in 1985, from Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is in charge of data analysis and processes. After studying economics in high school, and a year of engineering at university, he switched to physics, where he developed an interest in neuroscience and econophysics. At the time, quite some physicists made a living building economic models for financial institutions. Next, he started a PhD in cognitive neuroscience at the University of Amsterdam. In the last year of his PhD contract he worked on his dissertation during the day and Metrica Sports in the evenings and weekends, and vice versa when his PhD contract ended. He completed his PhD in November 2016.

Similarly, Dagnino also never thought he would start his own business. Even though he was interested in economics and business ever since high school, rather than starting his own business he thought it would be more likely that he would be applying his physics skills working for someone else’s company. Contrary to Saavedra, he does not come from an entrepreneurial family, in the sense of family members having founded their own company. His father worked for Exxon Mobil in the oil business for most of his career, and his younger brother works in international trade and commerce in the port of Buenos Aires.

The third founder is Enzo Angilletta (Chief Design Officer), born in 1982, and also from Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is in charge of video, UX and UI design. He studied filmmaking in Buenos Aires, especially the artistic and storytelling aspects of it. After graduating in 2005, he started working for TV producers. First as a cameraman, and later as a video editor. In 2009, when he was living in Buenos Aires and his girlfriend in Madrid, they wanted to live together in a place they did not yet know. Since she is a marine biologist, and he needed an international and culturally rich city to build his video production business, Amsterdam seemed a good fit. In 2009, they moved to Amsterdam, where he set up shop working as a self-employed professional, producing videos for international media and tourism companies.

Contrary to Saavedra and Dagnino, Angilletta already had experience being an entrepreneur and owning his own company. As a consequence, for him, the idea and decision of founding Metrica Sports was not that radical. Moreover, he grew up in an entrepreneurial environment because his family owns a car parts company in Argentina. Starting from scratch, his father build the business over a period of 40 years. After he retired, Angilletta's two brothers and brother-in-law successfully took over the company. In his family, risk taking is not perceived as being a big deal. You just try something, and if it doesn't work you move on.

How it started

Saavedra and Dagnino met at the Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience of the University of Amsterdam where they both worked as a PhD researcher, yet in a different subfield and building. They would often meet for lunch and started a football team to get "nerd scientists to play football and get out of the lab (Saavedra)". They also met the third founder – Angilletta – through playing football. First through the 'Argentinians playing football in the Netherlands' Facebook page, and later through the local FC Barcelona fan club that Saavedra set up. When Saavedra moved to Amsterdam in 2008, being a big FC Barcelona fan, he watched many Barcelona matches in local bars. At some point, however, he wondered why everyone was watching matches in different bars:

"So, I thought why do we always watch Barça games with 5 people. There's probably now, like, 20 bars in Amsterdam showing the same game with 5 people in each bar. Wouldn't it be nice if these 100 people were all together in a place watching it together?"

As part of the solution he decided to found the Official FC Barcelona fan club that, to his surprise, did not yet exist. Being the initiator, he also took up the role of president, which he performed for about 6 years. One of the first things he did was to make an agreement with a local Catalan restaurant called Taverna Barcelona in the Pijp neighborhood to open the restaurant more or less exclusively for the fan club whenever there is an FC Barcelona match. Restaurant Taverna imports all their ingredients and everything else they sell from Catalunya, even the tomatoes.

Around that time both Saavedra and Dagnino were becoming disappointed with how science and the academic system works and lost their motivation to work on their PhD dissertation. As a result, they started thinking about alternatives. According to Dagnino:

"I grew a little bit disappointed about the way science works. So, actually, before I started Metrica Sports, my first inclination was to work for a football club. So, I thought, OK, I like football, and I know how to analyze data, so maybe I can work for a football club...I was not really motivated in the last years of my PhD. So, I thought, what would really motivate me, that is still challenging and where I can apply my skills but it would be more fun? And then I thought about working for a football club. So, my first idea was not to start Metrica, but just working for a football club."

At the research institute where they were still working on their PhDs, they saw a flyer from the Postdoc Career Development Initiative that organizes 2-day retreats for scientists that are considering a career outside the university environment. For academics working at the university, it would be paid for by the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences. The goal of the retreat was to connect academics that are considering a switch to business, with former academics that currently work for other or set up their own companies. Here they met a person who set up his own biotech company. After having heard his story, Dagnino said to Saavedra: “If this guy could start a company, so can we.”

Saavedra and Dagnino combined their data and analytics skills with Angilletta’s video and editing skills. During their PhD research, the first two developed expertise in analyzing, tracking and making sense of complex positional data, and realized that this data is also available in football. According to Saavedra: “That’s what clubs were actually looking for, and that’s what we started”. They both knew they did not want to pursue an academic career, going from one temporary research position to another, and saw this as a unique opportunity to combine their analytical skills with their passion for football.

The first idea for Metrica Sports was born in early 2013, while having after work beers in student-owned and run bar and cinema Kriterion in the center of Amsterdam. The three of them would have passionate discussions about football. At some point, they were talking about how useful it would be to have more sophisticated software to support their discussions about football tactics. From there, it was a small step from how other football fans would enjoy it, to the value it could create for media companies providing sports content, and ultimately the football clubs themselves. According to Angilletta:

“Everything started with talking about football. We thought we didn't have anything to support our discussions and stuff. And we thought: OK, it would be great to have something that can empower our vision of the game.”

Before starting, they spent more than a year researching. So, by the time they set up the company, they knew very well what was needed. They found out that even though the data was available, people were doing very little with it. The first professional match they used as a pilot was with Dutch football club Vitesse. They got into contact with Vitesse through a father of a friend of a friend of a friend. Right after recording the match, they promised to send the data to Vitesse within 24 hours. Next, the three of them worked around the clock to prepare the data, finishing just before the deadline. At that time, they had to do everything by hand, from tracking the individual players to presenting the findings.

In late 2013, they went to Spain to further develop the product, collect information about the football market, and gauge interest from football clubs. Saavedra had some contacts at third division football clubs where they could experiment by allowing them to record and analyze matches to develop their ideas. In July, 2014, they contracted their first paying customer, Spanish football club Villarreal CF. According to Marcelino García Toral, its Head Coach, they signed the contract because: “We believe that Metrica Sports will help us by reducing the time we spent nowadays in tactical analysis, making it more efficient, and empowering the communication with our players through strong facts in a visual and intuitive way”.

Family and friends

Each of the founders discussed their ambition to start a company with their girlfriends. What helped was that because Saavedra, Dagnino and Angilletta had become close friends, so did their girlfriends, who also talked about it among the three of them. Saavedra told his girlfriend that he would need a few thousand euros from their joint savings for doing basic research and exploring the business idea. Being a rational scientist, his philosophy was that if it would not work out, he would have spent 6 months of his life figuring out how to start a business, which is always a good learning experience. He thought he could always go back to working in a lab, or figure out something else to do. Exploring this opportunity motivated him a lot:

“I had been living together with my girlfriend, so she knew how unhappy I was with what I was doing. So, I think seeing me motivated for something was really enough for her to say ‘just go ahead’. She was always very supportive. She never understood what we had in mind: ‘I don’t really understand what you want to do, but if you say so just go ahead’.”

Dagnino also involved his girlfriend in the decision. When decided to focus on Metrica Sports, he was not entitled to receiving unemployment benefits from the local government. In order to get it, he would have to attend courses to improve his job application skills and present a business plan. However, he did not have time for this because he was already working on Metrica Sports, which was going quite well from the start. As a consequence, he and his girlfriend were living off her salary and their savings for about four months. According to Angilletta himself, his girlfriend is very positive and open minded and when she saw his eyes light up when he talked about Metrica Sports, it was clear to her that he was very passionate about it. After making the personal decision to move back from Buenos Aires to Amsterdam, it helped that it was relatively easy for her to find a job at the University of Amsterdam.

Saavedra was the first in the family to go to university, and even pursuing a PhD. So, for his parents it came as quite a shock. While his father was mostly supportive, his mother did not understand why he would give up his academic career. Similarly, Dagnino’s father suggested that instead of quitting his job and starting a company, he could talk with his boss to see if his current job could be made a bit more attractive. Although in the beginning, his parents did not quite understand what Metrica Sports was all about, eventually they were very supportive. Finally, Angilletta did not involve his parents too much in his decision to start a new business. At first, they also did not really understand the business he was getting into, but they have always given him a lot of confidence when exploring new things.

Accelerators and incubators

In their early stage, Metrica Sports applied for the accelerator program Startupbootcamp in Amsterdam. Participants who are selected to join this program receive €15.000 in cash to cover living expenses, office space, an intensive 3-month training program, and mentoring by experienced entrepreneurs. The program culminates in Demo Day, where teams pitch their business idea to an audience of investors, entrepreneurs and journalists. In exchange, Startupbootcamp receives a 6-8% equity stake in all the participating startups. Metrica Sports

was one of the 20 that made it to the 3-day selection days. Here they met Startupbootcamp's investment team, mentors, and corporate partners to pitch their initial business idea. In the end, they were not one of the 10 teams that were invited to join the 3-month program.

When Bruno Dagnino shared his experiences at Startupbootcamp with a friend at work, this person introduced him to Jeroen van Duffelen, who back then was coordinating the start of the first business incubator of the University of Amsterdam: ACE Venture Lab. ACE stands for Amsterdam Center for Entrepreneurship, a non-profit foundation at the Faculty of Economics and Business, whose original goal was to stimulate entrepreneurship among university students. Once this goal was achieved through developing entrepreneurship courses and education programs, ACE changed its focus to incubation activities for university spinoffs. Metrica Sports joined ACE Venture Lab in February, 2014. ACE Venture Lab offers business training for (aspiring) entrepreneurs, access to a network of experts, coaching and mentoring by experienced entrepreneurs, and office space with shared facilities.

When they entered the ACE Venture Lab bootcamp, they had already done a lot of research, and build an MVP without knowing what an MVP was "because I'd never heard MVP before, only in basketball: the most valuable player [Saavedra]". ACE Venture Lab helped them a lot, for example in actually setting up the company. Besides Angilletta, who had prior experience running his own business as a freelancer, none of them had started a business before. ACE Venture Lab also helped them to systematically test and develop their business ideas "through talking to analysts and coaches, validating and finding out how they were working, what they were doing with data (Saavedra)".

ACE Venture Lab especially added value through their network of expert advisors and coaches. Whenever they had a problem or a question, they would go to its director Jeroen van Duffelen and later Erik Boer, who would hook them up with the experts, advisors, and mentors in ACE Venture Lab's professional network. On Fridays, most of the advisors are in the office building and available for free advice. Whenever there are specific needs, such as drafting actual contracts, the startups will have to pay. Metrica Sports, for example, hired one of the advisors in the ACE Venture Lab network to set up their formal company structure, a Holding structure with three separate Private Limited companies for each of the three founders and their investor. In the words of Saavedra:

"Everything from setting up the structure of the company... you know, each of us has a holding and it's a Private limited company. We didn't know what a Private limited company or Limited liability partnership¹, and all these kind of things, were. So, they gave us a lot of information about that. And then during the first year or so, a lot of strategic advice as well."

Robert Meijer, for example, provided them with valuable financial advice. Meijer has a legal and tax background and has been working in the banking industry for over 20 years, where he was responsible for financing small and medium sized companies. Later he became active

¹ A Private limited company is a Besloten Vennootschap (B.V.). A Limited liability partnership is a Vennootschap onder Firma (VOF).

as a startup coach. However, their most important mentor was, and still is, Gigi Wang. Wang, who lives in the San Francisco Bay area, is an experienced entrepreneur, startup investor, and head of consulting firm MG-Team through which she offers entrepreneurship related training and advice. In addition, she is a faculty member in UC Berkeley's Center for Entrepreneurship and involved in Stanford University's Venture Lab (VLAB).

The first customer

Finding a first customer was very difficult. They have tried absolutely everything. It involved a lot of cold calling, cold emailing, and even handwritten letters, with no one replying or showing interest. At some point, they started recording personalized videos, in which they addressed themselves to the coach, and sending these videos to some of the football coaches that have a personal profile on LinkedIn. If you are prepared to pay a small amount of money, you can contact anyone with a profile on LinkedIn via the InMail tool. However, this strategy didn't work out either. Eventually, Twitter played an important role in finding their first customer: Spanish football club Villarreal CF.

They did not target Villarreal CF randomly. The club is known in Spain for being a very innovative club with an open mind about new technology. Some years earlier, they were also the launching customer of another startup. Being aware of this, Saavedra went to their website to learn about the organizational structure of the club. They found out that the club had three analysts, and noticed that one of them – Dario Drudi – was a young Argentinian assistant coach in his mid 20s, which is quite young for such an important position. They decided to contact him through Twitter, using the fact that 2 of the 3 founders of Metrica Sports are also Argentinian. Since Villarreal FC is a relatively small club things went fast from the first contact to the final contract. As Saavedra recalls:

“I sent him – Dario Drudi – a tweet pretending I was Argentinian as well [Saavedra is actually Catalan], and told him ‘listen, we are three Argentinians in Amsterdam starting this project. You are a young analyst with a promising future. I think you'll like what we have. Can we meet and I'll show you?’ And then he said: ‘yes, sure’. And I went, he saw it, and he was like ‘wow, the coach needs to see that’. Next, he called in the coach. The coach saw it, and then he said ‘wow, I want it’. I talked to the sports director, and the day after I was negotiating with the president.”

When Dario Drudi, known for always being on the lookout for new things, received the tweet he informed his colleague Pablo Manzanet Monfort, who is not a big user of Twitter or other social media himself. Manzanet's role was that of fitness coach and tactical analyst. He collects data from training sessions and matches that can be used to improve the performance of the team and its players. They both immediately saw the potential of software. At that time, data and video were not integrated, while Footmapp allows one to combine everything at once. When they showed the product to the head coach, who is obsessed with analysing matches, he was very excited. So, they tweeted back, and invited Metrica Sports to come over to the club.

Villarreal, and especially Manzanet, played an important role in the technical development of Footmapp. Manzanet is usually the one who uses Footmapp to prepare information for the head coach and sometimes assists him in showing it to the players. He started to work very closely with Metrica Sports because he wanted to have a tool that could satisfy the wishes of the head coach.

“Each month we [he and Saavedra] speak two or three times to make it [Footmapp] better. I have an idea and I tell him, they have an idea and they speak to me about it. So, we are always in contact to improve the tool...It [Footmapp] is also like my son. It’s their son but it’s like my son-in-law.”

The first investor

After they sold their MVP to Villarreal CF in June 2014 they still had to produce the actual software tool. Moreover, Villarreal CF expected to have a fully operating product in August, before the start of the new football season. They expected to need €100.000. However, getting a bank loan was not an option because Saavedra already received a personal bank loan of €100.000 to start Metrica Sports. As explained by Saavedra:

“We sold the MVP to Villarreal but we still had to make the product. We had three months to make the product but we didn’t have the money or the hands, so we had to find the money and find the hands to do it.”

Because they needed cash fast, they contacted Chang Ng, a serial entrepreneur and investor, who they met during the selection days of Startupbootcamp where he was one of the roughly 200 mentors to who they pitched their business idea. Even though they were not selected for Startupbootcamp, when they were having drinks at the end of the day, Ng came up to them and said that he liked their idea, thought it was very promising, and told them not to hesitate to contact him in the future. Shortly after signing Villarreal CF, they contacted Ng telling him they had found a customer and were looking for €100.000 to build the product.

Ng has an MSc degree in financial economics from the Erasmus University Rotterdam. After having worked as a consultant for Cap Gemini and Ernst & Young, he started his own company Mconomy selling mobile and smart phone accessories. After having successfully build this company, Ng was looking for a new purpose. Because he enjoys sharing his experience, in 2011 he decided to become a mentor for startups. He also started to invest in technology startups and became an associate partner at venture capital firm Capital Mills. According to NG himself, he is not a purely rational investor who checks boxes, but someone who follows his intuition. When he met Saavedra and Dagnino at Startupbootcamp, he was not only interested in the product but also its founders, who struck him as being both intelligent and passionate.

When Ng showed an interest to invest in Metrica Sports, the founders contacted their most trusted and valued mentor, Gigi Wang, and asked her for advice. She advised them hire a lawyer to help them set up the deal with Ng and put them into contact with a law firm called SOLV that was also a network partner of ACE Venture Lab. She met one of their lawyers on

the ready-to-scale business trip he made to Silicon Valley. This trip is organized annually by ACE Venture Lab to help Dutch entrepreneurs understand the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Silicon Valley and to build a local network. Gigi Wang is the local partner who co-designs the program and facilitates meetings between Dutch and local entrepreneurs and companies. In return for his €100.000 investment, Ng received a 10% equity stake.

The first employee

Since none of the three co-founders was a software developer, they had to deliver a product that they themselves could not make. They therefore outsourced this to a friend of Saavedra from his hometown Barcelona, Marc Baiges, who they hired for 2 to 3 months to build the first version of the product. Having known him ever since he was 4 years old, he was almost like Saavedra's brother, and he trusted him completely. Mark was not interested in becoming a co-founder of the company because he preferred to have more security.

They hired their first fulltime employee, a lead developer, in January, 2015. Before finding him, they first hired someone else through regular job postings on websites. However, after a two-week trial period they decided to terminate his contract. This was not because of his technical skills in computer vision, but because he did not fit in the team. In addition, they wanted to prioritize product development. Not long after they posted the new job opening on several websites, co-founder Bruno Dagnino met fellow Argentinian Guido Villaverde through a mutual friend with who he was visiting Amsterdam as a tourist. Villaverde's friend and Dagnino studied physics together in Buenos Aires. This mutual friend suggested to have a beer with the three of them in Amsterdam around the time they signed their first contract with Spanish football club Villarreal FC in July 2014. When Dagnino told him about Metrica Sports and what they were doing, Villaverde said he loved to get involved.

After studying film studies for a year, Villaverde was active as a musician and became more and more interested in mixing music with technology. He therefore enrolled for a university degree in computer science in Buenos Aires. However, after one year he decided it would be more efficient to teach it himself using online resources, such as those from Stanford University. He got his first computer programming job, producing a website, from his father who back then was running his own small IT company. After having worked for an educational TV channel, he co-founded a video game production company with a couple of programmers, animation artists, and a game designer. He did this for about two years.

“Some of the technologies, I was, like, really looking into. At that time, I was mainly making video games, so it's really different, you know, the tools that you use to make video games and the tools you use to make this kind of software, but I was into it and I had a few freelance jobs where I used the same technologies that they were using, so for me it was, OK, this is really interesting.”

When he came back to Argentina after his tourist trip to Amsterdam, about a month later their mutual friend send him a Facebook post by Dagnino saying that they were looking for a developer. After a couple of interviews with the founders in which they also wanted to make absolutely sure he shared their passion for and knowledge about football, and a challenging

programming assignment, he was hired not much later in January 2015. As part of his hiring package, he was also offered a 3% equity stake in the company. This meant that each of the 3 founders would give up 1% of their equity. However, it took about another year to get the work permit through the immigration office. In the meantime, he worked remotely from Buenos Aires.

Villaverde had the impression that the cultural fit was perhaps more important than the technical fit with the team. Moreover, since none of the three co-founders were programmers themselves, it was very difficult for them to judge Villaverde's programming skills. According to Villaverde: "they were trying to do their best in order to judge something they actually didn't completely understand." Besides the cultural fit, it was important that Villaverde was transparent about his strengths and weaknesses when it comes to his programming skills. They were looking for someone who is independent, has general instead of specialist programming skills, a strong learning orientation, and who can adapt in the fast-changing environment of a technology startup.

Building the market

Villarreal FC's Manzanet, besides being actively involved in developing Footmapp as their first customer, also played an important role in promoting Metrica Sports and their product Footmapp in the football industry. For example, he gave a presentation about how Villarreal FC was using FootMapp to a large audience of industry professionals at the Sports Technology Symposium organized by FC Barcelona. He also gave a lecture in the Master of Sports Analysis program at Valencia University on the same topic. In addition, some well-known sports journalists published stories about him and how Villarreal FC uses Metrica Sport's Footmapp.

Perhaps most importantly, whenever his team goes to a match in for example Vigo, Madrid, Bilbao or Seville and Manzanet is setting up the cameras to register the match, his colleagues at these other clubs often ask him what he is doing, and how he uses the video footage and analytics to train the players. Manzanet often takes the time to explain or demonstrate how it works, refers them to Saavedra or Metrica Sports, and, vice versa, provides Saavedra with referrals and contact information about colleagues that have shown interest in Footmapp.

One of the football teams who asked Manzanet about his use of Footmapp was FC Barcelona. Sometime before, when FC Barcelona was going to play against Ajax FC in Amsterdam, being the president of the local FC Barcelona fan club, Metrica Sports' Saavedra organised a dinner before the match for which he personally invited some people from FC Barcelona. One of the people that showed up at the fan club dinner was Mr. Vilanova, the Vice President of Economic and Social Affairs (VP ESA). During the dinner Saavedra told the VP ESA about what he was doing with Metrica Sports, and used this opportunity to pitch Footmapp.

"He asked me what I was doing and I explained it to him and then I said 'well it would be nice to talk to someone in Barcelona' and he said 'okay, let's plan a meeting when you are in Barcelona, then you can show me'. After I showed it to him the next time I was in Barcelona, he put me into contact with someone in the club."

The person he put him into contact with was Raúl Peláez, Head of Methodology and Sports Science at FC Barcelona. Earlier, Saavedra was already put into contact with him through the husband of the best friend of his mother, who was the director of the Hristo Stoichkov Football School. Besides setting up a lunch with a lower level FC Barcelona employee, Vilanova put Saavedra in contact with analysts working below Peláez, who, in turn, introduced him to people higher in the organization. Before closing the deal, they had more than ten meetings. Besides Peláez, this included analysts, people at the medical department, and the first and second team. Ultimately, Peláez also had to convince FC Barcelona's CEO before they could finally sign the deal.

The fact that prestigious football club FC Barcelona had become a customer created a lot of buzz and attention from other clubs. However, scaling up the company turned out to be challenging because each customer has its own specific tactics and analytical needs. For example, Villarreal FC, uses the software for presentations to a single team and on a game-by-game short-term basis. This makes their workflow relatively simple. FC Barcelona, on the other hand, wants to use Footmapp for all their divisions and teams, including the first men's and women's teams, and youth teams. In addition, they asked for more, and more complex, data analytics. This required a lot of additional product development efforts.

What's next

Metrica Sports currently has the following customers that use their tactical analysis software Footmapp: Villarreal FC (June, 2014), FC Barcelona (August, 2016), US football club and winner of the MLS 2016 Seattle Sounders (February, 2017), the Professional Referee Organization (PRO) (March, 2017), and the US Soccer Federation (June, 2017). PRO is the organization responsible for managing the referee and assistant referee program in professional football leagues in the United States and Canada. The US Soccer Federation is responsible for the national football (or soccer) team of the US. At the time of writing, they are negotiating with a number of clubs in Europe and the US, as well as the German football league as a whole. Closing a deal with the whole German league would mean they go from 3 to 39 clubs in their portfolio of customers.

Saavedra expects the company to at least double in size in the coming year. The main focus of attention is building a sales department. Sales is currently done by Saavedra as part of his CEO role. They recently hired a sales person to cover the US market, who used to work for one of their main competitors: Catapult. The aim is to hire two more sales persons that each cover a specific geographic market, and who speak the language and understand the intricacies of culture. Saavedra will take up the role of managing this new sales team.

Metrica Sports is currently in a crucial phase. Because they need to scale up fast to ward off large competitors, organic growth is not seen as a viable option. They are therefore aiming for a €1.5 million investment. Before negotiating with FC Barcelona, they were operating more or less under the radar. But once they got involved with FC Barcelona, they caught the attention of their three direct competitors, which are large \$500+ million companies. For example, STATS, the company owning the sports data and analytics tool Prozone, aggressively tried to retain FC Barcelona as their customer. According to Saavedra:

“FC Barcelona had a contract with Prozone, one of our competitors, and they stopped, they cancelled their contract with Prozone to start with us. Next Prozone offered them three years for free because they can afford it. They don’t want to lose FC Barcelona as a customer so they are willing to give it to them for free.”

Mid 2017, Metrica Sports came close to an exit through an acqui-hire by Catapult, a large sports data and analytics company from Australia. Shortly after they were approached by this company, Saavedra, Dagnino and Angilletta flew to Australia to start the negotiations. However, their first and sole investor – Chang Ng – tried to convince them not to go. Ultimately, the founders agreed with their investor and did not get to an agreement with Catapult, and decided to keep going on their own.

In the near future, Metrica Sports, having limited resources that requires them to focus, has first set their mind on becoming the dominant player in the football market. They are therefore working hard to add new customers and build credibility. Early adopters play an important role in further developing FootMapp and convincing other clubs to buy it. Once they conquered the football market, they want to target other tactical team sports because it is specifically these types of sports where they can add most value. They are especially considering basketball, American football, hockey and rugby, but exploring other possibilities. Besides being tactical team sports, these sports are also popular enough that clubs can afford to buy FootMapp. What the future will hold is hard to tell because startups are bumpy and football is war.