THE NINES

1s & 9s Talent Intelligence Network

An AI-led system to identify football-intelligent business talent for franchise ownership, operation and growth

THE PROPOSITION Build a proprietary, continuously refreshed map of male and female goalkeepers and genuine centre-forwards who combine credible football experience with evidence of business capability—and use it to discover future Nines operators, investors, technical leaders, ambassadors and partners.

Concept note

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1. Executive summary

The Nines requires more than conventional franchisees. Its strongest operators are likely to understand the psychology, craft and culture of the two most specialised positions in football: the goalkeeper—the 1—and the centre-forward—the 9. The proposed Talent Intelligence Network would systematically find people who possess that football credibility and have also demonstrated the ability to succeed in business.

The opportunity is to create one evidence-backed database from three complementary populations: academically elite university 1s and 9s; former European junior-international 1s and 9s whose performance-football careers ended by 23 and who now have business careers; and current European semi-professional 1s and 9s who hold substantive business roles alongside football.

AI can automate most discovery, extraction, classification and periodic updating. Human research should be concentrated on identity verification, ambiguous positional histories and the small proportion of candidates serious enough to approach. The project should therefore begin as a lean recruitment experiment—not an elaborate six-figure technology platform.

RECOMMENDATION Run an 8–10 week pilot across England, Denmark and the Netherlands, plus three US universities and selected English semi-professional leagues. Test whether the system produces a meaningful number of credible operator prospects before expanding.

2. Strategic rationale

The Nines is a specialist development concept. Elite goalscoring and goalkeeping depend not only on technique, but on perception, decision-making, resilience, personal responsibility and the ability to perform under disproportionate scrutiny. People who have lived those positions carry an intuitive understanding of the product that a conventional franchise recruitment process cannot easily reproduce.

The database would not be built as a generic media or football-data product. Its purpose is to create a proprietary commercial network around The Nines. The value comes from locating rare intersections of experience:

- Position-specific football credibility as a goalkeeper or genuine central striker.
- Evidence of learning ability, professional progression or entrepreneurship.
- The operational capacity to build teams, sell, manage budgets and deliver consistently.
- A strong relationship to a city, country, university, football network or future franchise market.
- The motivation to reconnect a business career with a meaningful role in football.

3. The three target populations

Population	Inclusion definition	Strategic value
Academic universities	Male and female 1s and genuine 9s who represented the selected 25 US and, where data permits, 20 European universities.	Education, achievement, alumni networks and traceable professional careers.
European junior internationals	Male and female 1s and genuine 9s who represented a UEFA nation at U15–U21, left professional/performance football by 23, and now have a substantive business career.	Elite football pedigree combined with successful reinvention outside the game.
European dual-career semi-pros	Current male and female 1s and genuine 9s in defined semi-professional leagues who also hold substantive business roles, run companies or undertake serious professional study.	Current football credibility and demonstrated ability to balance operating demands.

The phrase ‘every player’ should mean every person discoverable within an explicitly defined source and competition universe. The university and junior-international populations can approach comprehensive coverage. The semi-professional universe must be bounded country by country because Europe has no consistent definition of semi-professional status and no single database connecting registrations with daytime employment.

4. Definitions and exclusions

1s

Goalkeepers identified through official squad positions, match records or credible club and association sources.

9s

Genuine central strikers or centre-forwards. A player listed only as ‘forward’ is not automatically a 9. Classification should use official descriptions, formations, match reports, shirt-number history, starting role and playing profile. Wingers, wide forwards and attacking midfielders are excluded unless there is clear evidence of sustained central-striker use.

Business career

Substantive employment, professional practice, entrepreneurship, business ownership, management, consulting, finance, technology, sales, operations or comparable commercial work. Casual work alone is insufficient. Coaching, scouting and agency work should be tagged separately and should count only when accompanied by meaningful business responsibility.

Stopped by 23

No meaningful professional or performance-level playing activity after the player's 23rd birthday. The system should distinguish 'left professional football', 'left performance football' and 'unconfirmed'. Recreational football does not disqualify a candidate.

5. The intelligence record

The platform should maintain one master identity for each person, with separate linked records for seasons, universities, clubs, national teams, education, employment and evidence. This prevents duplicate people and preserves changes through time.

Dimension	Core data
Identity	Full name, known variants, date/year of birth where public, gender competition, nationality and location.
Football	Position classification, university/club/national team, seasons, appearances, starts, minutes and position-relevant performance.
Education	Degree, subject, university, postgraduate study, MBA institution and completion year.
Career	Employers, roles, dates, seniority, sector, entrepreneurship, management responsibility and multi-site experience.
Commercial relevance	Likely operator market, language, geographic ties, network value and potential Nines role.
Evidence	Source URL, supporting excerpt, retrieval date, confidence and last-checked date.
Engagement	Research status, reviewer, outreach status, conversations, interest and next action.

Every material claim must be traceable. AI-generated summaries should never become standalone facts: each field should be marked verified, probable, unverified or contradicted.

6. Automated operating process

1. Define and version the target universe: universities, national associations, age groups, countries, seasons and eligible semi-professional leagues.
2. Collect official rosters, squad lists, statistics, match reports, media guides and archived PDFs on a scheduled basis.
3. Extract players and classify each as a confirmed 1, confirmed 9, probable 9 or excluded position.
4. Resolve identities across football, education and employment sources using name variants, dates, institutions, clubs, locations and career chronology.

5. For junior internationals, reconstruct the club timeline and assess whether performance football ended by 23.
6. Search the open web for employment, company, alumni, business-school and professional evidence; identify MBAs and other relevant qualifications.
7. Score role suitability and send uncertain records or high-value candidates to human review.
8. Refresh active players and priority prospects monthly or quarterly; conduct an annual full-population update.

HUMAN-IN-THE-LOOP Automation should generate the longlist. A researcher verifies only ambiguous identities and candidates likely to be contacted. This is the central mechanism for keeping cost proportionate.

7. Candidate classification

The aim is not to produce a single opaque AI score. Each candidate should be evaluated across observable dimensions and assigned to one or more commercially useful roles.

Dimension	Indicative weight	Evidence sought
Leadership & people	20%	Team leadership, hiring, development and responsibility for others.
Commercial capability	20%	Sales, partnerships, fundraising, customer acquisition or revenue ownership.
Operational execution	20%	P&L, budgets, projects, service delivery or multi-site operations.
Entrepreneurship	15%	Founder, early employee, acquisition, ownership or calculated risk-taking.
Football credibility	10%	Level reached, positional expertise, coaching and continued network.
Market strength	10%	Local roots, relationships, language and franchise-market relevance.
Education & learning	5%	MBA, postgraduate or professional qualifications and development pattern.

MBA completion is a useful signal, not a proxy for operating ability. The system should surface operator-ready candidates, emerging operators, investor-operators, technical-commercial partners, coaches/technical leaders, ambassadors and high-value introducers.

8. Technology architecture

Layer	Lean implementation
Database	PostgreSQL or Supabase with linked person, football, education, employment and evidence records.
Collection	Python-based web and document collectors, search APIs and scheduled jobs.
AI processing	Multilingual extraction, position classification, career chronology, entity matching and evidence summaries.
Research interface	Airtable initially, or a lightweight internal web dashboard with queues and filters.
Quality control	Confidence rules, duplicate detection, reviewer workflow, corrections and audit history.
Commercial workflow	Candidate lists, role tags, franchise geography, relationship owner and outreach status.

LinkedIn should be treated as a manual research and verification surface rather than the backbone of automated collection. The official API does not provide unrestricted bulk access to arbitrary third-party career histories. Open professional sources, employer pages, alumni material and company information should form the automated foundation.

9. Feasibility

Population	Assessment	Realistic initial completeness
US university 1s and 9s	High feasibility	85–95%
European university 1s and 9s	Moderate; fragmented records	50–75%
European junior-international 1s and 9s now in business	High for those with a public professional footprint	80–90%
European semi-pro 1s and 9s with business jobs	Feasible within specified leagues; not literally exhaustive continent-wide	50–70%, improving by market

The principal challenge is not discovering football names. It is reliably matching those names to current careers and proving that a football pathway ended at the required level and age. This is manageable when uncertainty is represented honestly and verification is focused on the candidates who matter.

10. Lean pilot

The pilot should test commercial yield before extensive engineering. Its purpose is to answer one question: does this population produce enough high-quality prospective Nines operators and partners to justify scale?

Pilot element	Proposed scope
Countries	England, Denmark and the Netherlands for junior internationals; England for initial semi-professional coverage.
Universities	Three US institutions representing Division I, Ivy League and elite Division III structures.
Positions	Male and female 1s and confirmed/probable genuine 9s only.
Historical window	Initially 2005–2018 for junior internationals, allowing time for subsequent business careers to emerge.
Output	Verified profiles, searchable database, operator classifications, evidence trail and priority outreach list.
Duration	Approximately 8–10 weeks.
Indicative cost	Approximately £5,000–£12,000, depending on internal technical capacity and verification depth.

A still leaner England-only research experiment could be conducted for approximately £2,000–£5,000. The cost should be treated as a hypothesis-testing budget, not a commitment to a permanent platform.

11. Pilot success measures

- Coverage: percentage of the defined player universe successfully identified.
- Accuracy: percentage of position, identity and career matches confirmed through review.
- Yield: number and proportion of credible operator-ready and operator-emerging prospects.
- Economics: cost per verified person and cost per high-priority candidate.
- Diversity: balance across men and women, 1s and 9s, countries and professional sectors.
- Actionability: candidates with clear geography, contact route and plausible Nines role.
- Refreshability: proportion of records that can be updated automatically without fresh manual research.

12. Expansion path

Phase	Scope	Decision gate

1. Prove	Three countries, three US universities and selected English semi-pro leagues.	Does the channel produce a commercially meaningful operator shortlist?
2. Expand	25 US universities, initial European universities, 10 priority countries and selected leagues.	Are match accuracy and cost per prospect strong enough for recurring use?
3. Scale	All 55 UEFA associations, broader league coverage, annual cohorts and self-verification.	Does the network warrant becoming proprietary infrastructure for franchise growth?

Over time, candidates should be invited to claim and enrich their own profiles, confirm career information and indicate interest in operating, investing in or working with The Nines. This would turn a research database into an opted-in community and long-term talent network.

13. Data governance

- Use only public, professionally relevant information and minimise collection.
- Do not infer or store sensitive characteristics unrelated to the commercial purpose.
- Document the lawful basis, legitimate-interest assessment, retention policy and privacy notice.
- Provide correction, objection and removal processes.
- Keep automated assessments explainable and require human review before consequential outreach or selection.
- Respect source terms, licensing restrictions and database rights; buy or negotiate access where necessary.

14. Immediate decisions required

9. Confirm whether ‘European’ means the 55 UEFA associations or a narrower commercial geography.
10. Approve the pilot countries, university examples and eligible English semi-professional divisions.
11. Agree the definitions of genuine 9, substantive business career and performance-football exit by 23.
12. Set the initial operator rubric and the Nines franchise markets against which geography will be scored.
13. Appoint one internal owner for product decisions and one researcher for final verification.

Conclusion

The concept is feasible and should be relatively inexpensive to prove. Its defensible value will not come from scraping the largest possible number of footballers. It will come from building the most credible map of 1s and 9s who have demonstrated that they can translate elite sporting experience into business capability—and then converting that intelligence into a high-quality operating network for The Nines.

PROPOSED NEXT STEP Commission the 8–10 week pilot, with a hard decision gate based on verified operator yield, data accuracy and cost per actionable candidate.