

Launching a brand

The World Cup is a truly global football affair with 32 teams from around the world competing and millions of fans totally focused on the tournament. Not only is national pride at stake, but a huge multi-billion marketing opportunity for soccer brands in a highly competitive field. Because the market for replica kits is so great, the major brands are gambling on backing the winner and this has led to some innovative products appearing on the market—including boots.

Adidas and Nike are probably the most high profile names on the soccer boot market. But, although some of the smaller brands do not have the marketing budgets of their more famous competitors, the underdogs are certainly giving them a run for their money in terms of

technical boots. As a result, "Football boots in 2006 are coming under more scrutiny than ever before," says Simon Skirrow from Nomis, one of the smaller brands.

It is a brave man who would dare to take on the already crowded multi-billion dollar soccer boot industry, but



Carrying the ball to the competition — Nomis is giving the big brands a run for their money in both the rugby and soccer boot markets

Skirrow is trying to do just that. Although he is well aware of the financial opportunities that success can bring thanks to the influence the big brands have and the increasing popularity of soccer around the globe—particularly in Asia, he says it is still the thrill of the challenge that drives him. “I’ve been involved in the creation of new sports shoes since I was 17 and love it even more today as the development of new techniques and advanced materials gives you so many more opportunities to diversify and attract different consumers to your products.”

Having said that, he admits he would be more than happy to be party to the rewards reaped from the 15-20% boost in the football boot industry because of the exposure received from the World Cup.

According to Skirrow, famous players have always had a very important role in influencing young players to be look-alikes of their heroes. This trend has never been so strong as it is today, yet not all brands can afford the huge sums of money that top players command for their feet. Nomis (Skirrow’s first name Simon spelt backwards) is one such company, but he hopes that new technology will prove to be its secret weapon....

The first step is the hardest

Skirrow was reluctant to use his idea at first but warmed to it after speaking to members of the retail trade and other contacts in the industry who believed that consumers like brands with personalities. He eventually came around to the idea that a David versus Goliath story could succeed against the bigger competitors if the brand built a rapport with its customers and, after three years of research and development, he launched the Nomis line.

This may all sound rather like a fairytale, but Skirrow should in no way be regarded as a novice. At 27, he had already spent ten years in the sports shoe industry, with most of that time at adidas where he was heavily involved in designing the original Predator boot. The Predator concept was a turning point for adidas in terms of competing with Nike and created the springboard that catapulted a stagnant market into one of 400% growth over the following 10 years. Skirrow knew almost everything there was to know about soccer boots. This was a huge advantage, as he also knew what wasn’t right with the boots then on the market, so he spent three years trying to create a boot that was specifically designed to meet the needs of players.

Making a mark

“I wanted to solve some of the great problems that kids, players and coaches are battling with the world over and felt that if I could do that I would be able to carve out a niche for my idea.

“At this stage you never know how long the project will take depending on whether it’s really a performance enhancement or not. I spent the first six months talking to as many people as possible to gauge how they really perceived the products they used.

“What quickly became clear was that there was great loyalty to the top brands but, somehow, nobody was saying that the market for the best ideas had been cornered by the ‘Big Two’. It was retailers’ feedback that caught me by surprise, as they implied that nobody could enter the market today unless they had \$100 million to spend. So, the challenge was firmly set and



Nomis Control Leather Technology provides its Glove and Spark soccer boots with improved grip in both wet and dry conditions.

I had to take it on so that I could at least say I had given it a go.” Three years on, Nomis has had some extraordinary successes and appears to have already won over retailers.

Nomis’ design philosophy is to solve the problems that players and coaches face in conditions that can change by the minute and, at the same time, try to build the most comfortable boots possible. It’s that simple. Independent tests have shown that the Nomis Control Leather Technology on its boots gives up to 16 times more grip and control on the ball in the dry and eight times more when the leather gets wet.

Back to basics

Over the last few years Skirrow says the market has focused on shoes being light and, while he admits this is a serious consideration, he feels it should not be the main feature. “Light shoes alone can never really improve a player’s performance and there is also a tendency for light shoes to lack the necessary heel support and midsole strength the foot needs to support itself.” Talking to podiatrists, players and coaches has made him more aware of the importance of quality upper materials and, although comfort is something the market in general still seems to be prepared to compromise on, Nomis does not.

It seems that there are plenty of converts too as Nomis boots and gloves are now sold in the UK, USA, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Germany. This is quite amazing if you think that the first shoes only appeared in Skirrow’s adopted homeland, Australia (he was born in the UK), less than a year ago.

Small-scale trials in a few selected retailers were tried at the back end of the season to see how the product would sell. If they outperformed other brands at the slowest time of the year then it could only be more positive at the start of the next selling season. It obviously worked, as Nomis outsold adidas in five of the stores. By now, Skirrow hopes to be selling his boots in over 18 countries—just as the World Cup starts. Good timing. 