

adidaspredator.com Research | Paper 03

The Price of an Idea

Craig Johnston, László Oroszi and the royalties behind the Predator

September 2026

18 sources, each figure tagged by confidence

adidaspredator.com/research

Two men outside adidas came up with ideas that shaped the Predator. One was a Liverpool winger who sold his patent back in 1998 and was homeless six years later. The other was a Hungarian inventor who spent fifteen years in court to win a fraction of what he claimed. This is the story of what each was paid, and what their ideas were worth.

2% Johnston's reported royalty on every Predator sold Reported⁶	€60–190m What that 2% could have paid from 1998 to today Our estimate	12% Share of his claim that Oroszi was awarded Confirmed¹³
---	--	--

1. The winger with a table-tennis bat

Craig Johnston's playing career ended early. He left Liverpool in 1988, aged 27, to care for his seriously ill sister in Australia.³ While coaching schoolchildren there, he started experimenting with rubber on the upper of a football boot to help grip and swerve the ball.² The first prototype, he says, used rubber torn from a table-tennis bat, and the ball squealed and swerved when he kicked it in the rain.⁵ By his own account he spent a fortune and three to four years on patents before anyone bought the idea.⁵

Nike, Reebok, Puma and adidas all turned him down.⁴ So he filmed three German greats, Franz Beckenbauer, Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and Paul Breitner, testing his prototypes in the snow, and took the tape to adidas.² Johnston says he forced his way into a board meeting at a time when the company was discussing bankruptcy, and that he owned the patent and licensed it to adidas.¹ He called it the "Supa Boot"; the Predator name came later, from a brainstorm with adidas marketers in Denmark.⁵

2. The deal, and the buy-out

Johnston's reward was a royalty on every boot sold, reported to be 2% of sales.^{1,6} He moved to Germany as the boot's lead designer and head of football innovation, and the Predator was launched in Las Vegas in 1994, ahead of the World Cup in the United States.¹

The boot was a hit, and that was the problem. In 1998 adidas pressed Johnston to sell his patents outright.^{1,7} The price has never been disclosed. It has been reported as a one-off multi-million payment, and Johnston himself has said it was far less than he should have received.^{1,6} Later he summed up the maths himself: millions of boots at over a hundred pounds a pair, with him on 2%.⁴

What was 2% worth? Our model

Step	Figure	Basis
Predator pairs sold since 1994	100–200m	Our estimate from Paper 02 ¹⁸
Share sold after the 1998 buy-out	c. 85%	Our estimate
Average revenue to adidas per pair	€35–55	Our estimate lower in early years
Predator revenue since 1998	€3–9bn	Our estimate
A 2% royalty, 1998 to 2026	€60–190m	Our estimate central case in the region of €120m
Years of patent life after 1998	c. 13–14	Our estimate patents last 20 years from filing
A 2% royalty, 1998 to patent expiry	€35–70m	Our estimate

A patent royalty would normally stop when the patent expires, 20 years after filing. We assume Johnston's patents were filed in the early 1990s, so the more realistic figure is the lower one. Even so, it is likely to be many times whatever adidas paid in 1998.

3. From millionaire to homeless

The money did not last. Johnston put it into a football school for inner-city children, which failed to win the backing he expected. He went bankrupt and was left temporarily homeless.³ He was reported to be worth A\$3m in 1999 and penniless by 2004.⁴

He kept inventing. He designed a second boot concept, the PIG (Patented Interactive Grip), which slipped over the toe of an existing boot, as well as the Traxion sole, and even software that tracks what is taken from hotel minibars.³ Since then he has built a career in photography.⁴

4. The Hungarian inventor

The second story began in Hungary in the mid-1990s. László Oroszi developed a boot with a ribbed striking zone of hard rubber at the toe, designed to help players shoot more accurately, and registered a Hungarian patent on 14 October 1996.⁹ In 1998 his representative showed it to adidas, which declined, saying it did not fit its plans for the new Predator Precision.⁹ The Precision then launched just before Euro 2000, and Oroszi recognised his idea in it.^{8,9}

Fifteen years in court: the Oroszi timeline

1996	Hungarian patent registered, 14 October. ⁹
1998	Design shown to adidas, which declines. ⁹
2000	Predator Precision launches before Euro 2000. ⁸
2002	Oroszi threatens a claim of over \$400,000 and sues adidas's Hungarian subsidiary, adidas Budapest Kft. ^{10,12}
2006	adidas launches proceedings to have the patent declared invalid. ⁹
2007	Drained by legal costs, Oroszi cannot renew his European patent protection. ¹⁵
2010	Hungarian Patent Office rules in his favour, 12 May. ⁹
2012	Courts rule with final effect that the Precision and Mania infringed his patent. ¹⁶
2014	Only now can he file his money claim. ¹³
2016	Court of Appeal orders adidas Budapest to pay four times the first award, plus interest from 23 March 2002. ¹¹
2017	Hungary's Supreme Court (the Kúria) upholds the award. ^{12,13}

5. What Oroszi actually got

Oroszi asked the court to return HUF 494,063,656 of enrichment that adidas had gained from infringing his patent. The final judgment awarded HUF 60,473,237 plus interest and rejected the rest.¹³ The court accepted adidas's own sales data as the basis for the calculation, and ruled there was no realistic way to claw back anything further for the growth in the Predator's brand value.¹³

The Oroszi case: claimed versus awarded (Hungarian forints)

Claimed Enrichment sought, 2014		HUF 494m
Awarded Upheld by the Kúria, 2017		HUF 60.5m

Source: Kúria press office via MTI¹³. The award carries interest from 23 March 2002¹¹, which is not included here.

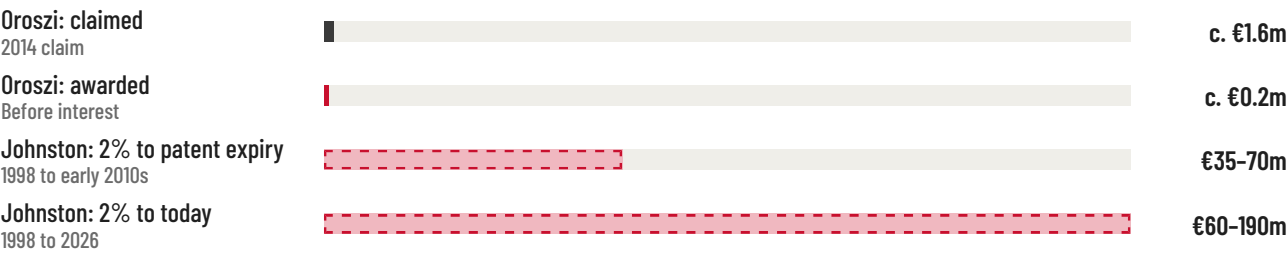
At mid-2017 exchange rates, the award was worth in the region of €195,000, or about £170,000, before interest.

Our estimate The claim had been in the region of €1.6m. **Our estimate** Several things kept it small. The case was brought against adidas's Hungarian company, so we read the award as reflecting Hungarian sales rather than

worldwide ones. Our estimate A translation error in his European patent application weakened its international protection, and once it lapsed in 2007, later boot designs no longer counted.^{11,15} The court also ordered Oroszi to bear 70% of the legal costs.¹⁴ He took on loans to fund the case and has said he did not come out ahead financially, though the court did confirm the idea was his.¹⁵

6. Putting the numbers side by side

The scale of the money (€m; pale bars are our estimates)



Oroszi's figures converted at c. 310 forints to the euro. Johnston's figures are our estimates; see the model above and Paper 02¹⁸. Bars are to scale against the €190m upper estimate; Oroszi's are drawn slightly larger than scale so they are visible.

Neither inventor got anything close to a share of what the Predator went on to earn. On our estimate, the boot has brought adidas somewhere between €3bn and €9bn since 1998. Our estimate Drawn on the chart above, that bar would be between 16 and 47 times the length of the longest one.

7. Who owns the Predator now

adidas no longer needs outsiders. Its Predator designs are now created and patented in-house. A US design patent for a football boot, filed in November 2024 and granted in August 2025, is assigned to adidas AG, names an adidas designer based in Erlangen as inventor, and lists an earlier Predator among its references.¹⁷ The company has kept the name, the heritage and the rubber-on-the-upper idea, and now owns every part of it.

What the money tells us

- **A royalty is only as good as its terms.** Johnston's 2% could have been worth tens of millions of euros; selling it in 1998 capped his share of the boot's success.
- **Patents expire; brands do not.** Even a perfect royalty would probably have ended in the early 2010s. The Predator name and its heritage, which adidas owns, have earned far longer.
- **Winning in court is not the same as getting paid.** Oroszi won on every point of principle and still recovered around an eighth of his claim, after fifteen years and heavy costs.
- **Small errors cost the most.** A mistake in one patent application weakened Oroszi's international protection and shrank his award.

Method and confidence

Every figure is tagged. **Confirmed** means the number comes from a court, official body or company. **Reported** means it has been published by one or more outlets but not confirmed by the parties. **Our estimate** means it is our own calculation or judgement, expressed as "in the region of". The terms of Johnston's sale to adidas have never been published; the 2% royalty rate is reported, not confirmed. Our royalty model builds on the Predator sales model in Paper 02 and assumes royalties would be paid on adidas's revenue, not retail prices. Currency conversions use approximate mid-2017 rates. Hungarian sources were read in the original. We welcome corrections at hello@adidaspredator.com.

Cite this research

adidaspredator.com Research (2026). *The Price of an Idea: Craig Johnston, László Oroszi and the royalties behind the Predator*. Research Paper 03, September 2026. <https://adidaspredator.com/research/the-price-of-an-idea/>

Text and charts are published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence (CC BY 4.0). Reuse is welcome with credit and a link. adidaspredator.com is an independent fan project with no affiliation to adidas AG. Figures are drawn from public reporting, court records as reported, and our own modelling, and have not been verified with the parties. This is not legal or financial advice.

Sources

1. **Newcastle Herald**, Craig Johnston's Predator boot saved adidas. March 2019. <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/5955405/how-craig-johnston-and-madonna-saved-adidas/>
2. **Wikipedia**, Adidas Predator. accessed September 2026. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adidas_Predator
3. **Wikipedia**, Craig Johnston. accessed September 2026. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Craig_Johnston
4. **The Hard Tackle**, Craig Johnston: the inventor who became a footballer. 2013, updated 2018. <https://thehardtackle.com/2013/craig-johnston-inventor-who-became-footballer/>
5. **Soccerphile**, Craig Johnston: adidas Predator boot. n.d.. <https://www.soccerphile.com/craig-johnstone>
6. **History of Soccer**, Craig Johnston: Liverpool winger and Predator inventor. July 2026. <https://historyofsoccer.info/craig-johnston/>
7. **The Football Pink**, Craig Johnston: the Liverpool player who invented the adidas Predator boot. February 2021. <https://www.thefootballpink.com/craig-johnston-the-liverpool-player-who-invented-the-adidas-predator-boot/>
8. **XpatLoop**, Hungarian inventor wins case against adidas. n.d.. <https://xpatloop.com/news/70494>
9. **Petošević**, adidas loses against Hungarian inventor in patent infringement suit. June 2010. <https://www.petosevic.com/resources/news/2010/06/000416>
10. **Just Style**, Hungary: Predator 'inventor' threatens to sue adidas. June 2002. <https://www.just-style.com/news/hungary-predator-inventor-threatens-to-sue-adidas/>
11. **CEE Legal Matters**, Sár and Partners and Danubia successful for inventor in patent claim against adidas. November 2016. <https://ceelegalmatters.com/index.php/hungary/5224-sar-and-partners-and-danubia-patent-and-law-office-successful-for-inventor-in-patent-claim-against-adidas>
12. **CEE Legal Matters**, Sár and Partners persuades Hungarian Supreme Court of alternate route to same result in adidas case. July 2017. <https://ceelegalmatters.com/index.php/hungary/6825-sar-partners-persuades-hun>
13. **M4 Sport (MTI)**, Fizetnie kell az adidas Budapest Kft.-nek [adidas Budapest must pay]. 1 June 2017. <https://m4sport.hu/2017/06/01/fizetnie-kell-az-adidas-budapest-kft-nek/>
14. **Piac & Profit**, Adidas-per: ezért bukott az európai szabadalom [why the European patent failed]. November 2016. https://piacesprofit.hu/cikkek/kkv_cegblog/adidas-per-ezert-bukott-az-europai-szabadalom.html

15. **Forbes Hungary**, A magyar feltaláló, aki legyőzte az Adidast [the Hungarian inventor who beat adidas]. December 2024. <https://www.forbes.hu/uzlet/oroszi-laszlo-feltalalo-interju-adidas-cipo-szver/>
16. **Daily News Hungary**, adidas to pay the Hungarian inventor of the best football shoe ever. November 2016. <https://dailynewshungary.com/adidas-pay-hungarian-inventor-best-football-shoe-ever/>
17. **Justia Patents**, US design patent D1088462, assigned to adidas AG. August 2025. <https://patents.justia.com/patent/D1088462>
18. **adidaspredator.com Research**, Paper 02: The Predator Economy. September 2026. <https://adidaspredator.com/research/the-predator-economy/>