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# EPA EUROPEAN TOUR

– Development of Mini Golf Tour for Mini Golf  
Open Standard Courses



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# EPA EUROPEAN TOUR – DEVELOPMENT OF A MINI GOLF TOUR FOR MINI GOLF OPEN STANDARD COURSES

The purpose of this thesis is to develop the sport of mini golf and the recently launched concept of mini golf open standard (MOS) courses as well as its tournament format.

MOS covers various mini golf courses that are not part of the three systems commonly used by the World Mini golf Sport Federation (WMF), even though the standard was developed mostly for Adventure Golf style courses that are rapidly becoming popular in Europe.

The ideas and conclusions mostly rely on the author's own experience in the sport, since little literature has been written about this sport and few people have wide experiences on mini golf competitions and businesses in more than one continent. This thesis also relies on the authors discussions with several mini golf officials and players over the years on the future of the sport as well as ideas of a European Tour.

The basic elements of event organizing are discussed first in order to find a practical way to organize a European-wide mini golf tour that attracts new players to the sport. The main goal is also to attract media and to find popularity to the sport.

The WMF has recently talked about the possibilities to arrange a European tour for mini golf, but has not yet taken any steps to plan it further. This thesis will hopefully help the WMF and push them forward to make the tour come true.

## KEYWORDS:

marketing, sponsorship, mini golf, putting, adventure golf, golf, mos, epa, european tour, sports tour

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## EPA EUROPEAN TOUR – MINIGOLFKIERTUEEN KEHITTÄMINEN MINIGOLF OPEN STANDARD -RADOILLE

Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on kehittää minigolfin kilpaurheilua ja erityisesti sen uusinta konseptia Minigolf Open Standard (MOS) radoista.

MOS kattaa käytännössä kaikki muut ratatyypit, jotka eivät ole kolmen tunnetuimman ratatyyppin joukossa. MOS on kuitenkin kehitetty eniten kattamaan ns. Adventure golf-radat jotka ovat kasvattamassa suosiotaan Euroopassa.

Tämän opinnäytetyön ideat ja päätelmät nojaavat eniten kirjoittajan omaan kokemukseen lajista, sillä tästä lajista on hyvin vähän kirjallisuutta ja harvoilla ihmisillä on runsasta kokemusta minigolf kilpailuista ja minigolf -liiketoiminnasta useammalla mantereella. Kirjoittaja on vuosien varrella keskustellut useiden eri minigolfvaikuttajien kanssa lajin kehittämisestä ja myös Euroopan kiertueesta, joihin tämän työn päätelmät perustuvat.

Työssä käsitellään ensin tapahtumajärjestämisen perusteita ja tätä kautta pyritään löytämään käytännöllinen tapa järjestää Euroopan laajuinen minigolfkiertue. Tavoitteena on myös houkutella mediaa lajin pariin sekä tehdä lajista suosittumpi.

Kansainvälinen minigolfliitto (WMF) on pohtinut mahdollisuuksia järjestää Euroopan laajuinen minigolfkiertue, mutta ei ole vielä vienyt asiaa kovinkaan pitkälle. Tämä opinnäytetyö ja sen kehittämisehdotukset toivottavasti auttaa WMF:a kehittämään ajatusta eteenpäin ja järjestämään kiertue.

### ASIASANAT:

markkinointi, sponsorointi, minigolf, puttaus, adventure golf, golf, mos, epa, euroopan kiertue, urheilukiertue

# CONTENT

<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (OR) SYMBOLS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Mini golf as a sport	7
1.2 Adventure Golf courses	7
1.3 The new concept	8
<b>2 EVENT ORGANIZING</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Event goals	9
2.2 Event planning	9
2.3 Event Organization	10
2.4 Post event activities	10
2.5 PGA European Tour	11
2.6 PGA European Tour Organization	11
<b>3 EPA: MEDIA AND MARKETING</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 EPA	13
3.2 Media And Public	13
3.3 Televising the events	14
3.4 Website and Internet	14
3.5 Players	14
3.6 Marketing players to media and public	15
<b>4 EPA TOURNAMENTS</b>	<b>17</b>
4.1 EPA European Tour	17
4.2 EPA European Tour Format	17
4.3 Qualification Events	18
4.4 Competition format	19
4.5 National EPA Tour Representatives	19
<b>5 SPONSORSHIP AND ADVERTISEMENT SPACE</b>	<b>20</b>
5.1 Getting sponsors	20
5.2 Sponsorship packages	20
5.3 Local sponsors	21

<b>6 ORGANIZING THE TOUR</b>	<b>23</b>
6.1 Tour goals	23
6.2 Tour organization	23
6.3 Tour structure	24
6.4 Post event activities	24
6.5 Future goals	25
<b>7 OTHER VIEWS TO THE TOPIC</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>8 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>28</b>

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1. Qualification event brochure example.

## **FIGURES**

Figure 1. Mind Map for Events. (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2014)	9
Figure 2. Event organization structure. (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2014)	10
Figure 3. Management and organizational structure of PGA of Belgium. (PGA of Belgium 2014)	12
Figure 4. Tour organization	23
Figure 5. Tour structure.	24

## **TABLES**

Table 1. Price breakdown example.	18
Table 2. Price breakdown example.	21
Table 3. Price breakdown example.	21

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (OR) SYMBOLS

EPA	European Putting Association (Invented)
MOS	Mini Golf Open Standard ( <a href="http://www.minigolfsport.com">www.minigolfsport.com</a> )
WMF	World Minigolfsport Federation
EMF	European Minigolfsport Federation
PPA	Professional Putters Association
SRGL	Suomen Ratagolfliitto
PGA	Professional Golfers Association

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Mini golf as a sport

Mini golf as a competitive sport with national federations has been around in Europe mostly since the 1950's, with European Championships held in 1959 (Seiz, 17), although the first association was formed by Sweden in 1937 (Seiz, 17) in Finland the first association was formed in the 1971. (Borg 2002, 24)

The biggest countries in the sport are Sweden and Germany with about 10 000 registered players.

The mini golf open standard (MOS), as formed by the world mini golf sport federation came along in 2008, since then only a few events have been taken into the WMF international tournament calendar.

The most seriously organized tournament in this field by the WMF has been the World Adventure Golf Championships which has been organized annually since 2010. (World Minigolfsport Federation 2014)

In Finland there are just a few MOS courses categorized as adventure golf. The Finnish mini golf federation, SRGL has organized the national championships for MOS in Jaala since 2010. As of 2014, the status of national championship will be dropped, due to the small amount of participants (SRGL 2014).

## 1.2 Adventure Golf courses

Adventure golf as a concept has really no official status, Adventure Golf has been just known as mini golf course with free form of shape, often including themed surroundings made to look like a park. The MOS standard has tried more or less to put this into paper, though adventure golf has not been mentioned in the rules.

On the other hand, adventure golf has been used in tournament names, such as the World Adventure Golf Championships.

### 1.3 The new concept

The idea of this concept is to create something new to attract media, more followers and more players to join the sport of mini golf (later addressed as putting) by making it an interesting, recognized, acceptable and popular sport activity. The sport itself has had better days in the past and since the 80's the sport has more or less lost individual members from WMF member nations. In recent years WMF has taken steps towards new nations for membership and this has resulted into new members especially from Asia.

We try to show that by concentrating to certain ideas we will achieve popularity and respect towards the sport. Most of this can be done by just good marketing.

We are not trying to prioritize to get the best top players from the traditional style courses to get excited of this tour on MOS courses, but rather to attract the best players that are playing, or have played, in these kinds of tournaments. Also we are trying to get new players to join the sport of mini golf from a different point of view, aside with the traditional game.

Until anything big is achieved, we don't expect the Americans for example to get much involved. For this we would need to achieve bigger guaranteed prize funds or personal sponsorships, to make it worthwhile to travel long distances. Even though, this will be our goal for future to achieve this.

Somewhere we need to start, and we hope that by concentrating to certain things we have a lot better chance to develop into a serious professional sport, as said, aside the traditional game.



## 2 EVENT ORGANIZING

### 2.1 Event goals

When arranging an event it is important to determine the goals of the event. Even with traditional events, there has been a goal to start from. Think in advance what you want to achieve with the event. (Vallo, Häyrinen 2008, 104-105).

### 2.2 Event planning

Conducting an event can be compared to a project. A project is a logically on going “chain of events”. To start a project you need a lot of inspiring ideas. (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2014)

The purpose of composing ideas is to give a variety of options to choose from. The most used types are mind mapping and brainstorming (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2014).

In the below figure there is an example of an event mind mapping.

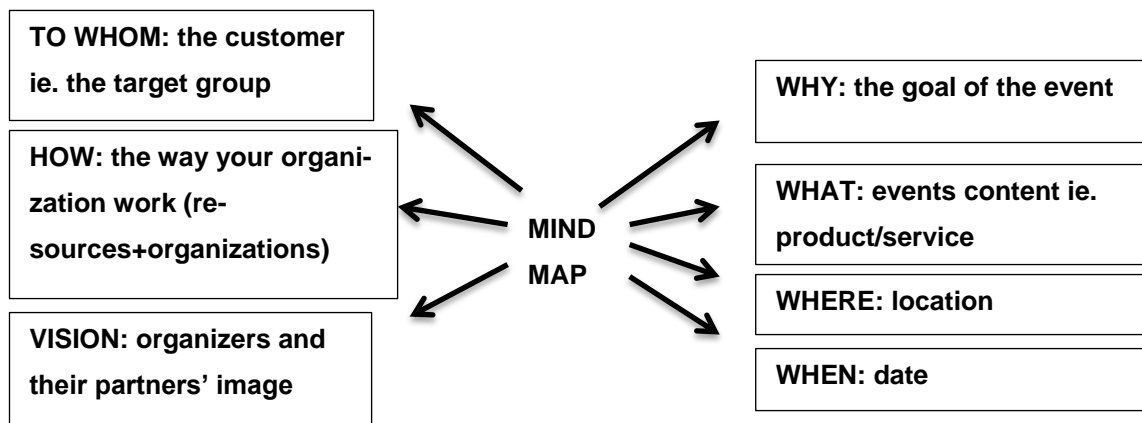


Figure 1. Mind Map for Events. (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2014)

### 2.3 Event Organization

It is important to make sure an event has the staff needed. The whole personnel have to know who is doing what, when and where. It is also important to have the team spirit, to get the best out of the personnel (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2014).

In the below figure we have an example of building an event organization.

**Building an event organization**

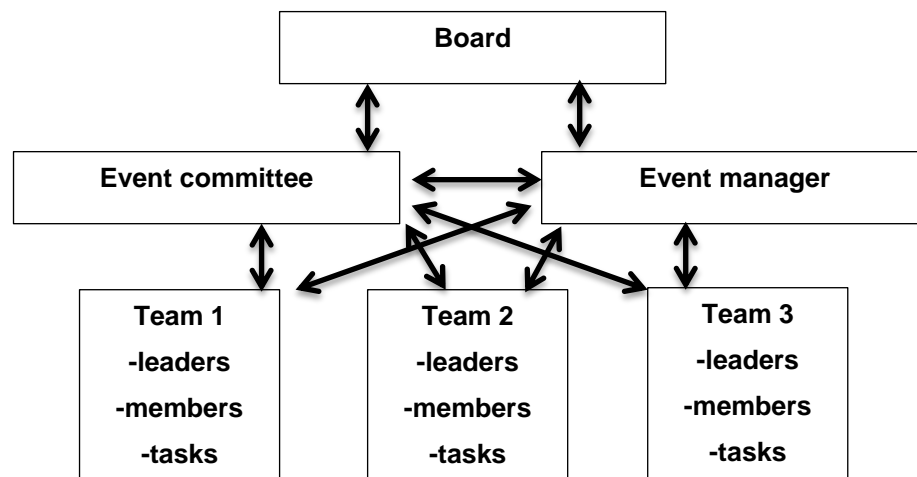


Figure 2. Event organization structure. (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2014)

### 2.4 Post event activities

After the event it's important to go through what went well and where we can do better. Detailed reporting is important so the organizers can analyze the feedback to make better preparations for future events. (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2014).

## 2.5 PGA European Tour

A similar example and a more known European tour is the PGA European Tour in golf. The PGA is a members association that continues to a global success of golf (PGA 2014).

The European tour is divided into three tours, the European Tour, the European senior tour and the European challenge tour. The PGA European tour is a unique business where the members, or in other words the tournament players, receive dividends by competing and receiving prize money.

As an example the 2010 The European Tour International Schedule consisted of 48 tournaments totaling 132,204,838 Euros in prize money. (The PGA European Tour 2014)

## 2.6 PGA European Tour Organization

The European Tour has a chief executive with an administration staff of 155, with the board of directors comprising of 12 members and a tournament committee of 15 players. (The PGA European tour 2014)

Below we have an example of a PGA management and organization structure from PGA Belgium.

In the figure the General Assembly of members has the sovereign authority specifically recognized through its by-laws and constitution. The board of governors is to ensure adequate funding and access to management expertise outside the board of directors. (PGA of Belgium 2014)

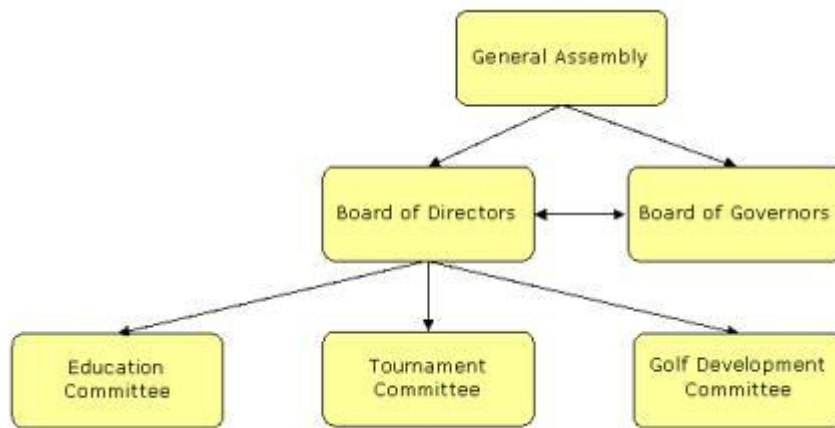


Figure 3. Management and organizational structure of PGA of Belgium. (PGA of Belgium 2014)

## 3 EPA: MEDIA AND MARKETING

### 3.1 EPA

We should create a new association that will put this concept to test, as an example we have European Putters Association (EPA). This association could be run under the governing of the WMF or EMF. This way it would benefit both associations. Both WMF or EMF and EPA could take advantage from each other in the ways they see fit. It would also give the possibility to deny certain things, if some individual rules don't suit each other's needs. There have been lots of talks about these kinds of ideas (European tour, MOS tour) and if the WMF wants to maintain as the top organization for mini golf, they should be the ones to develop this further.

This would also allow WMF to put different things to test. For example, try different clothing codes. As you noticed, I would also put a new name for the sport into test. By referring MOS mini golf as putting, it would give new possibilities and new interest for a wider range of old and new players. Hopefully, this would also attract golf players to try our sport.

### 3.2 Media And Public

The biggest part is to get the media and public more involved with the competitive side of the game. Often the media has just noticed the free time activity played on holidays.

To attract media I have discovered that a big part of the interest is made by the name of the tournament. By marketing tournaments with well known "major event" names like British Open, or US Masters this will give the media and public the feel that something big and important is going on. They might even dream being part of it one day.

Example:

In Finland there were many news articles and a radio interview, when a Finnish player won a tournament called the British Open (Ratagolf Foorumi 2014). This has been very exceptional in Finland in the recent years. I have also heard and noticed that there's been a lot bigger media interest in Sweden, when a player has won this same title.

I believe each country should have a strong marketing plan. WMF should make some guidelines to nations with some basic media marketing concepts for major events, at least when planning a major tour with a new concept.

### 3.3 Televising the events

We should put our best efforts to get local and national television stations to broadcast some material from these events. Also we should at least video the events ourselves, later this could be used for marketing purposes. I'm sure some local media schools, would be interested in doing this. Maybe even for free.

A good example of videoing the tour we have the PPA TV's broadcasts currently available at <http://vimeo.com/channels/179647>.

### 3.4 Website and Internet

A nice website is a must, with player details, video material, interviews etc. Also social Medias like Facebook groups are easy to create and these reach many people.

### 3.5 Players

Without sponsors it's difficult to get good players to travel through Europe to play tournaments if there is no guarantee that you'd make a living out of it. For

this reason, without big sponsors, we should concentrate this tour to just a small area in Europe. Take two countries, and you have a European Tour.

It will be enough if we get just a couple of players to compete in a tour of 3-4 events. Anyway, the media and public, is only interested in those who are at the top.

As a reference we could take Tiger Woods in golf, who solely gathers followers to golf. From Finland and from a similar sport in status as mini golf, Markku Uusipaavalniemi made curling a more known sport in Finland.

These will anyway be mostly just individual major events and the European tour just gives the extra ring to it. Of course we should, as a competitive view, give the total tour ranking an important factor to it too.

I'm also afraid and also sure that many top players on the traditional courses will not be interested in these kinds of events. Let us not concentrate too much on those, who are not interested, but rather to those who have played these events, have other merits and the ones who really are interested.

### 3.6 Marketing players to media and public

Here's an example from the PPA tour in the United States. They have built player profiles with some interesting facts about the players (PPA 2014). Professional status earned year, total career money earnings and total career round average. These profiles give the public and media the idea that these players are serious, they are not playing accidentally, they have played for a long time and they are good!

I would also concentrate on the clothing codes we are using now, by going with a different way like they do in Golf, Bowling and Billiards etc. Let's face the fact that there is no real reason to wear sneakers and jogging clothes, since we really are not a physically demanding sport. These clothes have a different purpose, for example in running, where they really are useful.

A clothing code is good to have. A clothing code that shows we are serious!  
Take examples of other professional tours in different, but similar sports.



## 4 EPA TOURNAMENTS

### 4.1 EPA European Tour

The European Tour concept would begin with a season consisting of 3 different tournaments. We should take tournaments that already exist to help us to get a ready working concept and also give the existing tournaments more valuation by joining it to a European wide professional tour.

As a marketing point of view, we'd already have a history for the tour too!

Such a tour shouldn't and couldn't necessarily start as a big nation to nation-wide tour, but as a big but small concept that would give everyone what they search for, an interesting and easy-to-reach tour. By this I mean that we shouldn't spread the tour from coast to coast but take a small area inside Europe, still with a chance to call it European. Just two countries arranging these tournaments would do this.

To expand the idea of a European wide tour, see qualification events, chapter 5.5.

The Great Britain as a putting oriented country would be a great starting point for this. We should for example take (negotiate) British Open, Scottish Open (terminated) and World Adventure Golf Masters as part of this tour. As earlier mentioned, these tournaments have the name and the history to them that is needed to attract media and public.

### 4.2 EPA European Tour Format

As an example we might include the British Open, Scottish Open and World Adventure Golf Masters (arranged outside the UK) for the tour in the first year. These events could be marketed as EPA European Tour Majors

Let's divide the players into amateur and professional category.

On each event we collect 30€ from amateur players (not wanting to spend more money to reach the top prizes) and 100€ from the professional players. Professional status and the membership in the putting tour would cost 50€ and amateur license 10€ (optional to support the tour).

From membership fees we get as an example:  $1000€ + 350€ = 1350€$ . This will be put to marketing (website, televising etc.)

If we consider there are at least 50 players on each event. By taking known events, we already have these! If there are 35 amateur and 20 professional players, we get  $1050€ + 2000€ = 3050€/event \Rightarrow 9150€/Tour$ . This we would consider as guaranteed prize fund.

Price breakdown 9150€ (guaranteed)				
Pos.	Pro	Am	Points	Tour
1.	1000	70	200	
2.	700	50	180	
3.	500	30	160	
4.	350		150	
5.	200		140	
6.	150		130	
7.			120	
8.			110	
9.			100	
10.			90	
11.			85	
12.			-5 etc	

Table 1. Price breakdown example.

#### 4.3 Qualification Events

Different countries should arrange qualification tournaments, to expand the concept of a European tour. These would be also very useful when searching for sponsorship.

We should find maybe at least 10 places in different parts of Europe. Bigger countries could have many qualification events. These tournaments should be selected in a way that they can handle a proper putting event. Participation to these tournaments could be available to everyone.

The EPA would give them their support in planning, marketing and organizing the event. EPA would also give them the chance to market the event as EPA European Tour (qualification) event.

#### 4.4 Competition format

Organize a 2-4 round event. Example EPA Malmö Open or EPA Finnish Open.

Organizing fee for EPA: 300€/event. The course owner allows us to place different commercial material on their course during the week of the event, at least.

Winner gets a flight gift card 200€ from our sponsor airline (Air Berlin etc.) plus free participation to EPA European Tour event (Pro category) and a free 3-day accommodation when registering to a EPA European Tour event.

Organizer keeps the participation fee 20-50€. Organizer can also give additional prizes.

Notice that we don't yet consider that we have a sponsor airline or a deal with local accommodation facilities. In the worst case, we spend the 300€ for the winners gift card and their accommodation.

#### 4.5 National EPA Tour Representatives

To make it easier for everyone, we could assign one person to each nation to handle the qualification events. This person would negotiate the event/events with course owners, organize the event and help getting sponsors. I'm sure we could find a suitable and interested person for this job at least in Finland, Sweden, UK, Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

## 5 SPONSORSHIP AND ADVERTISEMENT SPACE

### 5.1 Getting sponsors

Getting sponsors can be difficult, but I believe if we don't reach the skies at the beginning we can achieve some small goals on the first year already. Building up selling material to attract sponsors might take some time, so it's good to make plans for 2-5 years instead of a one-year plan. We should be able to show sponsors where their ads will be shown, how these are shown, who are following the event, how these are organized and give some statistics.

### 5.2 Sponsorship packages

If we have 10 qualification events + 3 major events and each event could give us at least a 1-week advertisement space on the courses (example 1x3 meter add). This would give more than 3 months advertisement for sponsors. In addition to this, we would give advertising space at least on our website, and in every possible other places like prize giving/interview booth.

(See next chapter "local sponsors" for what else we can offer the sponsor for them to get more value for their money.)

I would expect we'd easily get 500€ deals with different sponsors. We can also negotiate different kind of deals, for example with an airline. Maybe an airline would be willing to buy them a name for the tour, EPA European Tour by Air Berlin for example.

If we get 8 small sponsors with 500€ and an airline to sponsor the flights (increase in budget 2000€) this would give us an extra 6000€ for the EPA. At this point we might have had some extra expenses so we decrease this amount by 20%, which will leave us an extra 5400 for the prize fund.

Here we have 2 examples for the prize breakdown: we increase the event pots by 1800 or we add 3900 for the tour pot and increase event pots by 500€ each.

Price breakdown 14450€				
Pos.	Pro	Am	Points	Tour
1.	1300	70	200	1500
2.	800	50	180	1200
3.	600	30	160	600
4.	350		150	400
5.	200		140	200
6.	150		130	
7.			120	
8.			110	
9.			100	
10.			90	
11.			85	
12.			-5 etc	

Table 2. Price breakdown example.

Price breakdown 14450€				
Pos.	Pro	Am	Points	Tour
1.	1800	70	200	
2.	1200	50	180	
3.	900	30	160	
4.	500		150	
5.	300		140	
6.			130	
7.			120	
8.			110	
9.			100	
10.			90	
11.			85	
12.			-5 etc	

Table 3. Price breakdown example.

### 5.3 Local sponsors

To attract sponsors locally for one qualification event, local tour representative (see chapter 8) together with the course owner could arrange a small invitation-al barbecue for the sponsors and their (up to 5) quests. If we can locally get three small sponsors (200€/sponsor) at the course we could offer them refreshments and burgers. On the same time the national tour representative

could tell more about the tour and mini golf as a sport in general. Also the course owner could take the opportunity to offer mini golf packages for the sponsors businesses (summer get together). Also we could arrange the sponsors a small competition of one round. Winner of each sponsors guests gets a bottle of champagne. (Budget for this sponsor event 100€.)

This way, we could benefit 500€/event for the tour pot. The sponsors would get some value for their money also. If they spend 200€, they get (for 6 guests) a free round of golf, free burgers and refreshments and a bottle of champagne. And of course, advertisement space!

With this logic alone we would gain 5000€ for the tour. Also, this way, we could spread the word of the EPA European Tour and also spread the word of mini golf as a sport.

## 6 ORGANIZING THE TOUR

### 6.1 Tour goals

In chapter 3 we stated that it is important to have pre-determined goals when starting an event. For this tour we have gathered a couple of goals to start with.

- Mini golfing that attracts media.
- To attract more players to the sport
- Making a European tour in mini golf a known brand.

### 6.2 Tour organization

In chapter three we explained some basics of event planning and event organizations.

The diagram of the organization of the tour presented there can't be implemented as such to a new sports tour like this. In the following diagram we have an example of a structure that the actual tour could work with.

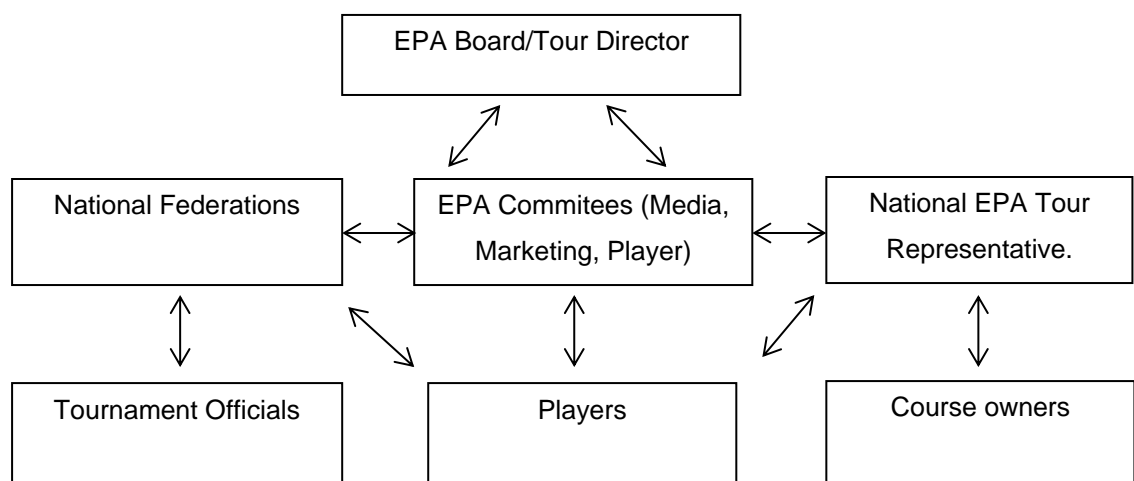


Figure 4. Tour organization

### 6.3 Tour structure

In the following figure we have an example of the tour structure.

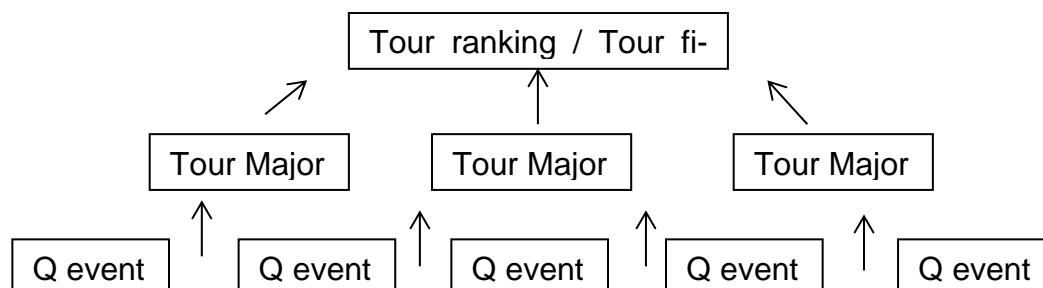


Figure 5. Tour structure.

### 6.4 Post event activities

As stated in chapter 2. It is important to collect feedback after the events and after the tour. We suggest that the local tour representative collect the feedback from the course owners and players of the EPA tour qualification events. The tour director on the other hand can collect the feedback from the EPA tour major players and course owners.

Together with the EMF/WMF, EPA board and committees we can analyze the feedback and make preparations for the future of the tour.

It is often a problem in our sport to get enough people to work on new ideas, in this case a European wide tour. With too big goals or too fast a pace, a lot can go wrong.

As previously stated, the tour could start just by taking existing individual tournaments and gathering the tour around these. I suggest we build name a small organization and determine the structure with the tour name to start with. Let us collect feedback from the first year and go fully with it the next year.



## 6.5 Future goals

In a longer term it is my goal that we could arrange a tour where individual course owners would fight for a chance to hold a European tour tournament. It is also my goal that these tournaments could be financially profitable to all, the course owners, the players and the organization.

## 7 OTHER VIEWS TO THE TOPIC

Based on interviews with different mini golf players and officials, the officials in Europe (most with long experience on the traditional courses) see problems with getting sponsors to make a big prize fund. They also see that we wouldn't get enough players to travel around Europe for a season long tour. Most of them are working full time and don't have the time or resources to travel.

The other groups of opinions I have found are the "America fans". In the USA there are two associations organizing a national tour. These people want to take it mostly the same way, but also the participants on their tournaments have decreased.

## 8 CONCLUSION

We don't expect everything to get big at once. We showed that by simple steps and with not much of investing, we can create something new and interesting easily, with possibilities to grow bigger.

This concept can also be turned into smaller tours within member nations and does not need to be a European-wide tour. Also other minor sports can adjust this concept to their own sports tour.

The Finnish mini golf association has not yet been enthusiastic by the ideas of a tour or just naming the tournaments in a different way. Although, no official way has been used to promote this idea to the SRGL, I know thoughts on this matter have been presented and discussed.

This is understandable for a tour on MOS, since the few courses we have.

The only MOS tournament we have had, the National Championship on MOS is being taken the championship status out for 2014. As the tournament calendar has been published at 9.1.2014 it seems the tournament will be called MOS-kilpailu (MOS-competition) (SRGL 2014).

The WMF and EMF on the other hand has heard of these ideas, but is yet to start implementing a European wide tour. A great development in the recent years has been the organizing of the World Adventure Golf Masters, held annually in Hastings, UK. For the first time, in 2014, this championship is being held outside the UK in Askim, Sweden. I believe this is a small step to the right direction that one day could develop into a European Tour.

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## QUALIFICATION EVENT BROCHURE EXAMPLE

**THIS WEEKEND—ALL WELCOME**



# EPA European Tour 2012

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**Tour Prize Pot 20 000€**

**Locally supported by:**



**facebook**

### **SCHEDULE (Sunday 12.6.2012)**

**08:00 free practice and sign up (Fee 30€)**

**09:40 Discussion of rules**

**10:00 Shotgun start for round 1**

**11:15 Shotgun start for round 2**

**Top 8 players + ties continue to final round**

**13:00 Rolling start on hole 1 for the finalists.**

**14:15 Prize ceremony**

### **PRIZES:**

**1. 100€**

**+Air Berlin gift card (200€)**

**+qualification to EPA Major**

**+3-day free accommodation**

**2. 50€**

**3. 30€**

**4.-7. product prizes**

### **TOUR PARTNERS:**

