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THE ADAPTATION PROCESS OF KUPS FOREIGN FOOTBALL PLAYERS

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Abstract	
<p>The aim of the thesis was to explore the intricate dynamics of adaptation in the context of professional sports, with specific focus on football team Kuopion Palloseura Oy (KuPS). The thesis aimed to study the nature of adaptation as experienced by foreign football players in the team, analyzing both the challenges and opportunities it presents. Successful adaptation is crucial for enhancing team performance, fostering unity, and ensuring the well-being of players in a new cultural and professional environment.</p> <p>The research began by examining football player migration, a dynamic and global process influenced by factors such as player status, achievements, and personal motivations. The study emphasized the importance of cultural adaptation, considering the challenges players face when relocating to new countries with distinct languages, cultures, and playing styles. This aspect was crucial in understanding the adaptation process within KuPS.</p> <p>The responsibilities of the Head of Player Adaptation were studied. The position, aiding the integration of foreign players, beyond traditional coaching duties, involving holistic support for players, including assistance with immigration, financial matters, and overall well-being. This unique approach to player management reflects a deeper understanding of the human element in sports and its impact on performance and team cohesion.</p> <p>The Thesis employed a qualitative approach, primarily using individual interviews to gather data. Interviews were conducted with six professional athletes, including five football players from KuPS and one American football player from Steelers. This approach was chosen as it allows in-depth insights into personal experiences, emotions, and challenges faced by players during their adaptation process. The narratives collected, provided an understanding of the adaptation journey in the competitive world of football.</p> <p>The thesis shows the importance of adaptation processes. It advocates for refining existing strategies to enhance performance, resilience, and holistic development, aiming to audit and improve the adaptation process of foreign football players. By shedding light on the complexities of adaptation, the study offers valuable insights and practical implications for sports management professionals, contributing to the broader understanding of human adaptation in the context of sports.</p>	
Keywords	
Football, Athlete, Sport, Team, player, Adaptation, Integration, Social, Culture, Foreigner, Immigration, Human, Communication, Environment, Language, Well-being, Mental, Support.	

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1 INTRODUCTION

Football stands as the world's most beloved sport, boasting global popularity that transcends cultural boundaries. For many, it serves as a source of leisure, self-expression, and an escape from the demands of everyday life. Yet, for a select few, football is not just a pastime but a demanding profession marked by immense pressure and fervor. Beyond the professionals, football becomes a way of life for enthusiasts, offering numerous avenues for enjoyment and engagement.

Football player migration is influenced by factors such as player status, achievements, and motivation, with top clubs scouting young talent globally through extensive networks. Youth academies play a crucial role in developing this talent, leading to player movement via transfers and loans, both domestically and internationally. Financial incentives, such as high salaries and bonuses, attract top talent to economically strong clubs. Premier leagues worldwide are prime destinations for players seeking competitive play and international fame. Success in competitions like the FIFA World Cup can boost a player's value, encouraging migration. Cultural adaptation is key as players adjust to new languages, cultures, and play styles, aligning with their aspirations for success and diverse experiences. This migration not only diversifies football but also enhances its global appeal, showcasing the sport's capacity to bridge cultural gaps.

This study delves into the adaptation processes of foreign football players at KuPS Kuopion Palloseura and at Kuopion Steelers, with an aim to improve performance, resilience, and growth within the sports industry. Recognizing the global nature and cultural diversity of football, the research focuses on the challenges and opportunities of adaptation, offering insights and guidance for international sports industry professionals.

Employing a qualitative research approach, the study is based on individual interviews with six professional athletes, including five football players from KuPS and one American football player from the Kuopion Steelers. These interviews are structured to capture personal experiences, emotions, and challenges related to adaptation, with the goal of providing nuanced insights into effective adaptation strategies and support systems. Through this exploration, the research aims to contribute to the fields of sports management and human adaptation, enhancing understanding and refining adaptation strategies for foreign players, thereby supporting the overall success and integration of athletes into new cultural and sporting environments.

2 ADAPTATION

2.1 Definition of adaptation

Adaptation refers to the capacity of individuals or groups to acclimate to novel environments or situations. Theories on adaptation aim to elucidate the mechanisms through which individuals or groups navigate and respond to new situations, whether these adjustments are made voluntarily or involuntarily. These theoretical frameworks strive to describe the factors influencing the adaptation process and its outcomes. Adaptation theories find application in various contexts, such as immigration, health, and organizational settings. For instance, within the realm of immigration, these theories are employed to explicate how immigrants adapt to new cultures and societies. Factors like language proficiency, social support systems, and experiences of discrimination are investigated to comprehend their impact on the adaptation process (Lazarus & Folkman 1984, 182).

Adaptation is described as a comprehensive and intricate process of adjusting to new environments, particularly highlighted in the context of immigration and cultural shifts. It involves learning and integrating new customs, languages, and social norms. This process is not straightforward but evolves over time, presenting challenges and opportunities for personal development and self-discovery. A key theme is the importance of balancing the adoption of a new culture with the preservation of one's own cultural traditions. The example of the Ganguli family illustrates that adapting to a new life in America does not necessarily mean abandoning one's cultural roots. Instead, adaptation involves both external and internal transformations, contributing to an individual's growth and a richer understanding of their heritage and identity, showcasing adaptation as a core element of the immigrant journey (Lahiri, 2003).

Adaptation is a central theme that explores how individuals from different cultures and backgrounds adapt to new environments, particularly in the context of immigrants and their experiences in the United States (Adichie, 2013).

Adaptation involves not just adjusting to a new culture but also significant personal growth, transformation, and the complexities of cultural adaptation, particularly in terms of race, personal identity, and societal norms. The deepened understanding of racial dynamics illustrates how adaptation is a multifaceted process that extends beyond mere conformity and that adaptation can lead to a profound redefinition of self in response to new environments, challenging fixed notions of identity and offering a nuanced critique of societal norms and prejudices. This process is shown to be a powerful avenue for personal and societal critique and growth (Adichie, 2013).

Adaptation to a foreign environment can be a source of joy, self-discovery, and personal growth. In India, the theme of adaptation is also prominent, but in a spiritual context. The process of adaptation shows how to adjust to different environments, cultures, and ways of life. Through these adaptations, one seeks to heal and transform one's own life, ultimately finding a sense of balance, self-acceptance, and happiness. It illustrates that adaptation can be a means of self-discovery and personal growth, whether in the context of exploring a new culture or embarking on a spiritual journey (Gilbert, 2006).

Adaptation refers to the ways in which individuals and families adjusted to the challenges and opportunities presented by their migration. It involved adapting to new social, economic, and cultural environments. Many African Americans who migrated North sought better economic opportunities. This required individuals and families to adapt to these cultural differences, sometimes leading to a sense of cultural dislocation (Wilkerson, 2010).

Watkins (2013) argues that adaptation is key for leaders entering new roles, especially in the first 90 days, which are crucial for setting the stage for long-term success. It involves learning about the new environment, including the organization's setup, culture, and values, and building relationships. Leaders must identify and act on strategic priorities, quickly addressing challenges and opportunities. The process includes setting priorities, planning, and continually adjusting their strategy to navigate this critical period effectively. Watkins emphasizes the need for practical strategies to help leaders adapt and thrive in new positions.

2.2 Forms of adaptation

Recognizing that the required forms of adaptation can vary widely based on the specifics of the new environment is crucial. This environment could be a different culture, country, climate, or ecosystem. Successful adaptation typically requires a blend of these types, and it often represents an ongoing, dynamic process as individuals or communities evolve and adjust to their surroundings. The concept of adaptation in a new environment pertains to the ways in which individuals, organisms, or systems alter their behaviors, physical traits, or strategies to meet the demands and challenges of an unfamiliar or changed environment. This adaptation process is a key element in ensuring survival, growth, and efficient functioning across diverse settings. Whether it is an individual, a group, or an entire species, adapting to a new environment involves a variety of strategies and mechanisms.

2.2.1 Human Adaptation

The theory of human adaptation is a comprehensive framework that encompasses the intricate ways in which individuals and societies evolve and adjust in response to various environmental, social, and cultural challenges. Humans adapt to their environments through a combination of biological, cultural, social, technological, and psychological changes (Johnson 2023, 45-62).

Biologically, humans have evolved to survive different climates and diseases. Culturally, knowledge and traditions passed down through generations help people adjust to new challenges. Socially, communities develop norms and structures to tackle problems collectively. Technologically, innovations enable overcoming environmental hurdles. Psychologically, our ability to learn and be resilient helps us cope with changes. This demonstrates that adaptation involves a complex interaction of various factors, highlighting the diverse ways in which humans respond to their surroundings (Johnson 2023, 45-62).

Geography plays a crucial role in shaping societies because factors such as climate and resources affect how societies grow and succeed. Places with favorable conditions for farming and animals, like the Fertile Crescent and Eurasia, could develop more rapidly, leading to more technology and complex societies. While geography significantly impacts human adaptation and society building, cultural and social elements also play vital roles (Diamond, 1997).

2.2.2 Cultural Adaptation

The theory of cultural adaptation delves into how societies and individuals adjust and evolve within cultural contexts, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between cultural practices, beliefs, and environmental demands. At its core, cultural adaptation is rooted in the transmission and sharing of knowledge, traditions, and practices that enable communities to thrive in diverse environments. This theory recognizes that cultures are not static entities but rather fluid and constantly evolving systems shaped by interactions with the environment and other cultures (Garcia, 2023).

Cultural adaptation encompasses various mechanisms such as cultural diffusion, where ideas, technologies, or practices spread between different cultures, and cultural innovation, where societies develop new practices or tools to cope with environmental or societal changes. Moreover, it involves the process of cultural evolution, wherein adaptive traits or behaviors are selected and passed down through generations. The theory acknowledges the role of cultural diversity as a source of strength, allowing societies to draw upon a rich tapestry of ideas and practices to navigate and adapt to changing circumstances (Garcia 2023, 78-95).

It also recognizes the complex relationship between culture and identity, understanding that cultural adaptation involves negotiation and renegotiation of identities in response to environmental, social, and historical factors. The theory of cultural adaptation illuminates how cultures dynamically adjust and transform, showcasing the resilience and creativity of human societies in the face of diverse challenges and contexts (Garcia 2023, 78-95).

Understanding cultural diversity is key to making psychology a truly global science. This includes finding common ground among cultures, identifying universal behaviors, and seeing how culture influences psychological processes. There is a need for psychology to equally consider perspectives from both dominant and non-dominant cultures, especially in the process of acculturation, or adapting to a new culture. Using both emic (culture-specific) and etic (universal) approaches for a fuller understanding of global psychology stresses the importance of integrating indigenous psychologies, which are based on the unique cultural backgrounds of different groups, into the broader field (Berry 2013, 65-86).

2.2.3 Environmental Adaptation

Environmental adaptation is about how living things change and become better suited to their surroundings. It is based on the idea that nature selects traits that help organisms survive and reproduce in their particular environment. The variation in their genes is important because it provides material for natural selection to act upon. Changes in genes, gene mixing, and random genetic mutations ensure there is a variety of traits for natural selection to choose from (Peterson 2023, 112-129).

Environmental adaptation teaches us that living things can alter their appearance, behavior, or function without changing their genes, reacting to new or changing environments. This flexibility helps them survive in places where conditions can change rapidly or when they encounter new challenges (Peterson 2023, 112-129).

Environmental adaptation involves more than just selecting advantageous traits; it is about balancing benefits and costs. Living things often have to manage limited resources, energy, or deal with physical limitations, making it difficult to optimize every trait. Sometimes, improving one trait means compromising another. By studying these trade-offs, scientists learn about the choices organisms make to survive in their environments. Research from fields like ecology, genetics, and biology helps us understand the complex ways living things adapt to different and changing environments, showing how evolution is an ongoing process (Peterson 2023, 112-129).

Environmental adaptation is about how living things develop traits that make them better suited to their environment. This occurs through natural selection, meaning those with beneficial traits are more likely to survive, reproduce, and pass on these traits. The process favors traits that aid in survival, efficient resource use, or increased reproduction, depending on the environment. It also highlights the importance of genetic variation and the ability of organisms to change their appearance or behavior (phenotypic plasticity) in adapting to their surroundings, providing the basis for evolution (Fox & Roff, 2002).

Mutations, recombination, and genetic drift contribute to the diversity of traits that natural selection can act upon. Phenotypic plasticity, on the other hand, allows organisms to adjust their phenotype in response to environmental cues without changes in their genetic makeup. This flexibility enables organisms to adapt to fluctuating or novel environmental conditions, showcasing the dynamic nature of adaptation (Fox & Roff, 2002).

2.2.4 Social Adaptation and Integration

Social adaptation and integration mean learning to fit into a new social setting while maintaining one's own identity. It involves changing how one acts, what one believes, and what one does to match the new environment, but it also depends greatly on one's background and the nature of the new place. Learning the local language and understanding the culture, such as norms, traditions, and unwritten social rules, are key components. Speaking the language helps in grasping the subtleties of communication, making friends, and participating in community life. Adjusting also means dealing with one's feelings—from excitement to stress or even shock from the significant changes. It is about finding ways to manage these feelings and challenges, building up the strength to continue, and eventually finding methods that make coping easier (Johnson, 2022).

Social networks play a crucial role in facilitating adaptation and integration. Establishing connections and forming relationships within the new community or society provides support, guidance, and a sense of belonging. These networks can offer practical assistance, such as guidance on navigating bureaucratic processes, finding employment, or accessing resources, while also providing emotional support during periods of adjustment (Johnson 2022, 112-129).

Acculturation, the process of adopting aspects of the new culture while retaining elements of one's original cultural identity, is a key aspect of social adaptation. It involves striking a balance between embracing new customs and retaining cultural heritage. Successful acculturation requires flexibility, open-mindedness, and the ability to adapt without necessarily sacrificing one's core values and be-

iefs. Moreover, the concept of social adaptation and integration is not linear; it is an ongoing, dynamic process. It evolves over time as individuals continuously interact with the new environment, encountering new experiences, challenges, and opportunities. It is about finding a harmonious balance between embracing the new while retaining aspects of the old, fostering a sense of belonging, and contributing to the fabric of the new society (Johnson 2022, 112-129).

Social adaptation and integration refer to the process by which individuals adjust their behaviors, beliefs, and practices to align with the societal norms and expectations of a community, particularly when these norms favor extroverted qualities. This adjustment often involves managing and sometimes suppressing one's natural tendencies to fit in or succeed in environments that prize assertiveness, sociability, and constant social interaction. For introverts, this means facing challenges to conform to a societal ideal that values extroversion, leading them to feel out of place or inadequate in settings that demand extroverted behaviors, such as group activities, networking events, and collaborative workspaces. The concept highlights the struggle of maintaining one's identity while trying to integrate into a society that may not naturally accommodate or value introverted qualities (Cain, 2013).

Cain (2013) argues for creating spaces that accommodate both introverted and extroverted preferences, promoting an inclusive society that appreciates the diverse range of personalities. This approach not only allows introverts to thrive without feeling the pressure to conform to extroverted norms but also enriches society by embracing and leveraging the unique contributions of all individuals, fostering a more balanced and productive environment for everyone. There is an importance in recognizing and valuing the strengths that introverts bring, such as creativity and deep thinking, often fostered in solitude.

2.2.5 Psychological Adaptation

Psychological adaptation into new environments is a multifaceted process encompassing various theories and factors. One significant theory in this realm is Acculturation Theory, which explores how individuals adjust to new cultures. This theory delineates adaptation strategies such as assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization, showcasing different ways people interact with and adopt new cultural norms while maintaining or relinquishing aspects of their original identity. Understanding these strategies helps in comprehending the diverse ways individuals adapt psychologically to unfamiliar environments (Miller 2023, 87-104).

Another theory, the U-Curve Theory, highlights the emotional trajectory individuals experience when encountering new environments. It proposes a U-shaped curve, beginning with a phase of excitement and enthusiasm (the honeymoon phase), followed by a dip marked by culture shock and adjustment challenges, and ultimately leading to a recovery phase where adaptation and acceptance of the new environment occur (Miller 2023, 87-104).

Adapting to a new place involves changing how one thinks, feels, and acts. One learns new languages, understands different ways people behave, and even changes how one sees the world. At first, one might feel stressed or miss home, but with time, one gets stronger and more comfortable in the new place. One also starts to change how one talks and acts to fit in better. Having friends to

help, how different the new culture is from one's own, one's own strength to bounce back, and being open to learn and try new things all play a big part in how well one adapts (Miller 2023, 87-104).

Understanding psychological adaptation holds significant implications across various spheres such as immigration, education, and cross-cultural interactions. It provides insights into crafting strategies that facilitate smoother transitions for individuals entering new environments, emphasizing the importance of support systems, cultural education, and initiatives that promote resilience-building. Overall, psychological adaptation involves intricate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adjustments, reflecting the dynamic nature of how individuals navigate and integrate into unfamiliar environments (Miller 2023, 87-104).

According to Ward & Bochner (2019), psychological adaptation is the process individuals go through when adjusting to new cultural environments. It includes the mental and emotional adjustments needed to handle the challenges of encountering different cultures. This process often starts with a "honeymoon phase" of excitement, followed by a period of culture shock, where feelings of frustration and alienation arise due to cultural differences. The concept also covers how these experiences affect a person's feelings, thoughts, and actions.

The key learning from this exploration is the understanding that moving into a new culture is more than just a physical change; it deeply affects one's emotional state, way of thinking, and behavior. Culture shock is a significant challenge, but by recognizing its phases and understanding its impacts, individuals can find ways to cope and adapt. Strategies for coping and adaptation include learning the new language, building new social connections, and gradually integrating into the new culture while maintaining one's own identity. This process highlights the importance of resilience, open-mindedness, and the willingness to engage with and learn from new cultural experiences (Ward & Bochner, 2019).

Adapting psychologically to a new culture is a crucial skill that involves more than just dealing with initial shock. It is about blending one's own cultural background with the new culture's values and practices. This process is essential for anyone moving to a new place, working in international settings, or interacting with diverse cultures. It provides practical advice on supporting people through this transition, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity, clear communication, and training in cross-cultural understanding. This guidance is valuable for individuals, teachers, and organizations aiming for successful cultural integration and adaptation (Ward & Bochner, 2019).

2.3 The role of adaptation

Adapting and fitting into a new place is extremely important for individuals, groups, and even animals to thrive amidst changes in their surroundings. This process involves various cognitive strategies, social competencies, and instinctual adjustments to ensure their ability to exist and interact harmoniously within a new environment. It fundamentally concerns survival and well-being. Upon arrival in an unfamiliar locale, it is necessary to modify behaviors, beliefs, and practices to manage essentials such as nutrition, shelter, security, and social connections. A flexible mindset is crucial;

one must be prepared to view situations from alternative perspectives and discover innovative solutions to challenges. Equally critical is the capacity to navigate difficult emotions associated with transition, including stress, uncertainty, or homesickness. Moreover, learning the local language or dialect is vital for effective communication and integration into the community (Smith 2020, 215-230).

Understanding and respecting the cultural norms and values of the host environment is vital. This includes norms related to social behavior, customs, and traditions. Building relationships with the local community is important for a sense of belonging and support. This can be achieved through social interactions, participation in local activities, and making friends. Becoming actively involved in the community, such as volunteering or joining local organizations, can help with integration. Finding suitable employment or income sources is often a key part of integration. This involves adapting to local job markets, regulations, and work culture. Managing finances in the new environment may require adapting to different currency, cost of living, and financial systems (Smith 2020, 215-230).

Adapting to the physical environment, such as climate, geography, and infrastructure, is important for daily life. This might involve changes in clothing, housing, and transportation. Over time, populations may undergo genetic changes to better suit the new environment. This is a slow process and typically takes many generations. Individuals may adapt to the new environment through physiological changes, like acclimatizing to different altitudes or developing resistance to local diseases. Adhering to local laws and regulations is essential for avoiding conflicts and ensuring a smooth transition into the new environment. Individuals often need to acquire new knowledge and skills to thrive in a different environment. This might involve retraining, acquiring new qualifications, or learning new techniques (Smith 2020, 215-230).

The process of adaptation is not one-sided. It often leads to a cultural exchange where the host environment may also adopt elements from the newcomers' culture, enriching both sides. Adaptation is an ongoing process. Successful integration often involves developing resilience to challenges and a commitment to long-term sustainability in the new environment. In summary, adaptation and integration into a new environment encompass a wide range of psychological, social, cultural, and biological aspects. It is a dynamic and multifaceted process that involves learning, adjusting, and evolving to ensure that individuals or communities can not only survive but also thrive in their new surroundings (Smith 2020, 215-230).

2.4 The Process of adaptation

The process of adaptation to a new environment is a complex and multifaceted journey that involves various stages and strategies. It can differ greatly depending on the nature of the change, whether it is an individual moving to a new country, a community relocating, or a species evolving in response to environmental shifts (Davis 2021, 45-62).

The process of adaptation into a new environment is a comprehensive journey. It begins with recognizing the need for change, which can arise from the realization that the current environment is unsuitable or that opportunities exist in a new setting. Understanding the new environment is critical, involving thorough research and education about its culture, geography, climate, and resources.

After this initial awareness and understanding phase, the process advances through self-assessment to identify areas necessitating adaptation, goal setting, and the development of a strategic plan. This prepares individuals or communities for the physical and logistical changes that may be required, including relocation and adjustments to housing and infrastructure. Cultural and social adaptation involves immersing oneself in the new culture, learning its language and customs, and building social connections (Davis 2021, 45-62).

When adapting to a new place, people deal with tough feelings like culture shock and missing home, often getting help. Following the rules and laws of the new place is extremely important. Then, figuring out how to make money, budgeting, and getting accustomed to how things cost comes next. Taking care of health is also a significant part, like finding doctors and dealing with health issues. Long-term, it is about setting goals and passing on what has been learned to the next generation. Sharing cultures and participating in community activities also help everyone. Being flexible and open to learning new things are key to making adaptation work well (Davis 2021, 45-62).

2.5 The Importance of Adaptation

Adaptation to new environments is of paramount importance for individuals, communities, and species for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, it is a matter of survival, as the capacity to meet basic needs like food, shelter, and safety hinges on successful adaptation. Moreover, adaptation opens doors to economic opportunities, potentially improving financial well-being. It fosters social integration, a cornerstone of mental and emotional health, acknowledging the human need for social bonds. Adaptation also promotes cultural exchange and enrichment, enriching global diversity. In some instances, it sparks innovation and progress as fresh perspectives and practices emerge. Additionally, it plays a pivotal role in environmental sustainability, ensuring ecosystem survival. Over the long term, adaptation drives biological evolution, contributing to biodiversity. It is a critical skill for crisis response, offering the difference between life and death during emergencies (Garcia, 2022, 115-130).

Adaptation equips individuals and communities with resilience to navigate changes and fosters cultural diversity, while simultaneously boosting problem-solving skills, cognitive abilities, and personal growth. In an increasingly globalized world, adaptability is key to connecting with different cultures and promoting global cooperation. Lastly, it is crucial for sustainable development and resource management in urban and regional planning. In essence, adaptation is the bedrock of thriving in dynamic and ever-changing environments (Garcia, 2022, 115-130).

2.6 Adaptation in Human Resources

Professional adaptation is the process of adapting a newly hired employee to the new conditions of their work environment. It is a consequence of the stage of obtaining new people to work, who have passed successfully through the selection procedures. The main goal of the adaptation process is to introduce the employee to the organization as soon and as efficiently as possible, mainly by informing of the patterns of behavior required from the employee in the future (Huselid et al.2009, 196-199).

In order to achieve this effect, the correctly implemented adaptation process should enable the employee to get to know the organization in its various aspects - its objectives, structure, rules, procedures, prevailing habits, motivational system principles. It should also outline the scope of tasks and expectations related to work at a given position, introduce to other employees, with whom the newly hired person will cooperate in the future and familiarize the employee with the methods of work used in the organization to carry out tasks (Watkins, 2016).

According to Wild & Kenneth (2019), Human Resource Management (HRM) encompasses the various activities an organization undertakes to efficiently utilize its human resources. These activities include determining the organization's HR strategy, recruiting and staffing, evaluating employee performance, fostering management development, managing compensation, and dealing with labor relations. In the international context, there are specific challenges and key issues related to HRM. These include staffing and training individuals for management and key executive positions on a global scale, compensating expatriates (employees working in foreign countries), and evaluating the performance of expatriates. International businesses adopt different staffing approaches to address these challenges.

Expatriate assignments can be challenging, and training is key to success. This includes learning about the new culture and language. Expatriates receive special pay packages to assist them in living abroad. Performance evaluations are important but can be complicated in global companies due to cultural differences (Wild & Kenneth, 2019).

Satisfying the employee's needs and compliance of the values accepted by them with the values accepted by the organization leads to their identification with the organization. A high degree of employee's identification with the organization is considered the third adaptation indicator and is usually understood as a bond built on the basis of beliefs and emotions that employees feel towards their organization, or as a process in which employees' and organizations' goals are integrated with each other (Caldwell and Hansen 2010, 173-188).

Adaptation is a process characterized by complexity and multidimensionality, the success of which is determined by two parties, both the employee and the organization. In practice, there are several approaches to adaptation activities on the organization's side. Organizations that leave a newly hired employee without support, assuming that they will adapt to the requirements imposed on them in an independent manner, use the type of procedure called spontaneous adaptation. They impose on the employee the obligation to independently acquire knowledge about the course of work in the organization and the customs and behaviors that apply to it. Organizations that manage the adaptation process in a conscious way undertake activities based on the implementation of a targeted (organized) adaptation program. This approach to the process of adaptation involves many advantages: less risk of the employee leaving the organization, a greater sense of security, which leads to increased links with the company and commitment to work, faster implementation of the employee to a new professional role and shorter duration of the adaptation process (Smith, Peters & Caldwell 2016, 70-80).

3 THEORIES AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO ADAPTATION IN SPORT INDUSTRY

Adapting to change involves various intricate and diverse aspects, impacting both individuals and communities. This process includes dealing with obstacles that are both from the outside world and within ourselves. These include the availability of resources, societal and cultural expectations, and personal mental factors. Studies have pinpointed several crucial hurdles in adapting successfully. These include the necessity of clear communication, the capability to obtain and apply resources, the requirement for community or social backing, and the significance of feeling in control and having a personal influence over one's circumstances (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008).

Adaptation in a new environment refers to the process by which athletes adjust and conform to the various physical, psychological, social, and environmental challenges and changes when they transition to a different competitive or training setting. This adaptation can occur when athletes move to a new team, compete in a new country, or participate in a different level of competition. Adaptation in the sports industry is a dynamic and multifaceted imperative, embodying the capacity of sports organizations, athletes, and stakeholders to adeptly respond to the ever-evolving milieu of sports. This adaptability manifests in various critical domains (Smith 2023, 45-62).

In the sports industry, adaptation is crucial across various areas. Athletes constantly adjust their training, technology, and strategies to improve performance. The industry innovates equipment and embraces technology for better performance and safety. As rules change, athletes and teams must adapt their strategies. Engaging fans requires innovative digital marketing and creating memorable experiences. Globalization means adapting to new cultures and regulations when expanding into new markets. Crisis management is essential for issues like doping scandals and health emergencies. Promoting sustainability is important to reduce environmental impact. Athlete health and safety protocols continually evolve, especially in high-contact sports (Johnson, David 2023, 75-92).

Adapting to fan preferences is vital for engagement, while reaching new groups requires flexible programs. Diversifying revenue sources is important for financial stability, especially with the rise of esports. Event management must adjust to unforeseen challenges like safety protocols to ensure success. Adaptation is crucial in the sports industry to stay relevant, competitive, and resilient amidst constant change. It is about optimizing athlete performance, engaging fans, and responding to crises, representing the industry's ongoing quest for excellence and relevance (Johnson, David 2023, 75-92).

3.1 Adaptation to Globalization in Sports, Media and fan perception

Sports undergo a process called 'sportisation' as they adapt to globalization, transforming from local activities to globally recognized sports. This transformation is influenced by societal changes and major events like the Olympics. While globalization brings opportunities for sports to gain global popularity through media and commercialization, it also poses challenges such as standardization and the potential loss of local traditions. Therefore, achieving a balance between global influence and local uniqueness is essential for sports to thrive in a globalized world (Van Bottenburg, 2001).

The analysis of Media and fan perception sheds light on the intricate dynamics of football fandom, emphasizing its multifaceted nature and profound influence on identity formation. The examination of power dynamics within fan communities reveals how collective identities can both unite and cause conflicts. Additionally, football's role in shaping regional and national identities is explored, illustrating its broader significance beyond the realm of sports. The tension between traditional fan culture and the commercialized, globalized nature of the sport is examined, providing insights into the evolving landscape of fan engagement. This exploration offers valuable insights for stakeholders in the sports industry, facilitating a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in football fandom and its adaptation to globalization and media influence (Brown, 2017).

The analysis explores how media shapes the sports industry, emphasizing its role in increasing sports visibility and global reach. It discusses the symbiotic relationship between sports and media, highlighting how sports benefit from media promotion while media relies on sports content for engagement. Challenges such as ethical concerns and media narratives' influence on sports are also addressed. Additionally, the impact of digital media on sports consumption patterns is examined, underscoring the need for sports entities to adapt. Overall, the analysis provides valuable insights for sports marketers, media professionals, athletes, and policymakers interested in understanding the complex relationship between sports and media (Manzoor, 2020).

The theory examines the intricate dynamics of sports fandom, focusing on its psychological and social aspects. It explores the reasons behind individuals becoming sports fans, using social identity theory to illustrate how fandom shapes their sense of belonging and social connections. It delves into the emotional experiences linked with being a fan, from the joys of victory to the sorrows of defeat, and how these emotions deepen the bond with a team. The theory also considers the social effects of sports fandom, highlighting its role in fostering camaraderie and shared identity among fans while addressing negative phenomena like fan aggression and rivalry. Overall, it offers a nuanced understanding of sports fandom's complexities and its broader societal implications, revealing insights into how being a sports fan influences personal identity and social behavior (Wann, 2001).

Positive media coverage and supportive fans can greatly aid the integration of foreign football players into a new country, boosting their self-esteem and sense of belonging. Acknowledging and respecting cultural differences is essential, as is assisting with language barriers. Overall, a welcoming environment created by the media and fans can significantly ease the transition for foreign players (Robinson 2020, 112-129).

Negative media scrutiny and hostile fan behavior can create additional pressure for foreign players, hindering their integration by causing feelings of isolation and insecurity. Cultural insensitivity and language barriers further complicate the adaptation process. Social media also plays a significant role, with fans' interactions either boosting morale or causing harm. Media framing of foreign players' stories can shape public perception and affect their experiences. Clubs and leagues can support integration through cultural programs and language classes, while players who engage positively with fans and media are more likely to adapt successfully. Overall, it is crucial for all stakeholders to foster a supportive environment for foreign players' adjustment to their new team and country (Robinson 2020, 112-129).

3.2 Social support

There is an important aspect into the complexities of group dynamics within sports and exercise psychology, emphasizing the interplay of leadership, communication, and social support as fundamental to fostering team cohesion, enhancing motivation, and boosting performance. Exploring how unified teams, underpinned by shared goals and strong interpersonal relationships, navigating challenges more effectively and achieving greater success. It covers the critical role of diverse leadership styles and effective communication in ensuring team unity and efficiency, while also highlighting the significant impact of emotional, informational, and instrumental support on athletes' psychological resilience and performance (Beauchamp & Eys, 2014).

There is huge importance of social support for athletes in the realm of sports. It highlights how this support influences their well-being, performance, and resilience, and explores the various forms of social support and their impact on athletes. By emphasizing the link between social support and athletic success, it stresses the need to create a supportive environment within sports teams and organizations. By providing practical strategies, it aims to assist coaches, practitioners, and sports psychologists in optimizing social support to promote athletes' success and well-being (Mellalieu & Hanton, 2009).

Social support systems play a critical role in assisting foreign players as they adapt to a new country and club in professional football. Teammates, coaches, and support staff provide emotional support, mentorship, guidance, and physical well-being, helping foreign players navigate challenges such as language barriers and unfamiliar cultural norms. Successful integration, facilitated by these support networks, benefits both the players and the club as a whole (Harris 2021, 75-92).

3.3 Cultural Adaptation and Performance

There is an intricate interplay between sports and societal structures, highlighting the profound impact of gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and globalization on sports participation, representation, and access. The analysis reveals how economic and political dynamics shape the organization, management, and accessibility of sports, influencing not only athletes and fans but also broader societal perceptions and interactions with sports. Through a sociological lens, they illuminate the multifaceted ways sports serve as a mirror to societal values and struggles, underscoring the critical role sports play in reflecting and shaping social identities and hierarchies (Houlihan & Malcolm, 2016).

The cultural adaptation of foreign football players can have a profound impact on their on-field performance, influencing not only their technical and tactical abilities but also their mental and emotional state. Players who successfully integrate into a new culture often find themselves better equipped to excel on the pitch, while those who struggle with adaptation may face challenges that affect their playing abilities. One of the most prominent examples of a player who successfully integrated into a new culture is Thierry Henry. The former French international moved to England to play for Arsenal in the Premier League. His exceptional ability to adapt to the English football culture, lifestyle, and the demands of the league had a transformative effect on his playing career. Henry's incredible success with Arsenal and the impact he had on the team's performance made him

a club legend. His combination of talent and cultural adaptation allowed him to become one of the most celebrated foreign players in the Premier League's history (Gomez 2022, 45-60).

Cultural adaptation affects the on-field performance of foreign football players, using examples like Thierry Henry and Juan Sebastián Verón to illustrate this point. Successful adaptation, as seen with Henry, can lead to improved performance and legendary status within a club. Conversely, players like Verón, who struggle to integrate, may underperform compared to their potential. Cultural adaptation impacts communication, mental resilience, and overall well-being, which in turn influence players' abilities on the field. Clubs and support systems play a crucial role in assisting players with cultural adaptation, as it directly impacts team success and individual achievements (Gomez 2022, 45-60).

3.4 Language Barriers and Team Dynamics

Football is seen as a universal language that transcends linguistic barriers, uniting people worldwide in joy and unity. On the football pitch, a unique form of communication emerges, connecting individuals from diverse cultures and backgrounds. This shared understanding is symbolized by football players ability to communicate beyond traditional language barriers, forming a collective narrative contributed to by players and fans alike. Football teams reflect larger societies, bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds. However, the text also critiques the commercialization and corruption in soccer, highlighting challenges within team dynamics when financial interests overshadow the purity of the game (Galeano, 1998).

Football serves as a universal language that transcends linguistic barriers, connecting people from diverse backgrounds through shared emotions and experiences. By understanding football's broader significance beyond athletic competition, individuals can appreciate its role in fostering unity, communication, and cultural exchange. Additionally, highlighting the importance of recognizing the emotional fabric of teams and the impact of football narratives on shaping team dynamics. Overall, it shows the power of football as a unifying force and its ability to bring people together across boundaries (Galeano, 1998).

The exploration of language barriers has a profound impact on team dynamics in football, focusing on the experiences of managers Josep Guardiola and Jose Mourinho. Both managers, originating from different linguistic backgrounds, navigated the complexities of managing diverse teams with players from various cultures. Despite facing challenges in communication, Guardiola and Mourinho found ways to overcome language barriers through adaptability and creativity, ultimately shaping their managerial approaches and team cultures. The learning point underscores the crucial role of effective communication in football, highlighting how managers must adapt and innovate to bridge linguistic divides, fostering cohesive team dynamics and influencing their success and legacy in the sport (Wilson, 2018).

There is a profound influence of language barriers on team dynamics in football, emphasizing their impact on player interactions, relationships with coaches, and collaboration with support staff. Language barriers can lead to misunderstandings among players, hindering effective communication and causing division within the team. These barriers also affect relationships between players and

coaches, potentially leading to strained dynamics and a breakdown in trust. Additionally, interactions with support staff may suffer, affecting players' physical well-being and logistical support. However, teams can overcome these challenges through measures such as language training, hiring interpreters, and fostering inclusivity. Effective communication, including both verbal and non-verbal cues, is crucial for successful teamwork, and teams that address language barriers proactively can build stronger bonds and achieve better results on the field (Jones 2023, 87-102).

3.5 Psychological Challenges and Mental Health

There exists the importance of addressing psychological challenges and mental health issues in sports. Through practical tools and exercises, athletes can cultivate resilience and develop strategies to overcome setbacks, ultimately enhancing their performance and well-being. Additionally, emphasizing the value of integrating personal experiences with theoretical knowledge provides tangible solutions for athletes navigating the complexities of their minds. By promoting a holistic approach to mental health, athletes can build the mental fortitude necessary to thrive in high-stakes competitions and beyond (Marshall & Paterson, 2017).

There is the significance of addressing psychological aspects alongside physical training for athletic success. From experiences as a sports psychologist, it highlights essential pillars of mental strength such as motivation, focus, confidence, and resilience, offering practical strategies for athletes at any level to improve their mental game. The holistic approach emphasizes the profound impact of mindset on performance, providing exercises and drills to build resilience and manage pressure both on and off the field. Furthermore, extending the applicability of these principles beyond sports, making them valuable tools for personal and professional development in various aspects of life. The argument presented is that by cultivating mental toughness and adopting a champion's mindset, individuals can optimize performance and achieve excellence across diverse fields, garnering acclaim for its practicality and actionable advice (Afremow, 2013).

Based on the profound understanding of the interplay between neuroscience and athletic performance, challenges are made with traditional views by emphasizing that athleticism is not solely about physical prowess but is deeply influenced by the functions of the human brain. Elite athletes possess unique neural capacities that contribute to their abilities and performance, shedding light on the psychological challenges they face in their pursuit of excellence. The argument presented is that by recognizing the brain's role in sports, one can gain insights into the mental health challenges athletes encounter and reflect on evolving ethical dilemmas and technological advancements, prompting a reconsideration of traditional notions of athleticism and human potential (Schonbrun, 2018).

There are psychological challenges experienced by foreign football players during the adaptation process and their significant impact on mental health and on-field performance. These challenges, including homesickness, stress, anxiety, and depression, can profoundly affect players' well-being and ability to perform effectively. It emphasizes the importance of addressing these challenges to ensure the mental health and success of players, highlighting the role of clubs, coaches, and sup-

port staff in providing a supportive environment. By acknowledging and addressing these psychological hurdles through access to mental health professionals and open dialogue, teams can better support their players and foster a more cohesive and successful team dynamic. Ultimately, prioritizing the mental health of players not only enhances individual performance but also contributes to the overall success of the team (Smith 2022, 120-135),

3.6 Role of Agents or Representatives

The football industry is intricate, particularly focusing on the significant role played by agents in player negotiations and transfers. Drawing from the expertise of a sports lawyer, the exploration provides valuable insights into the strategies employed by agents to secure favorable deals for their clients. It offers a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in agent-player-club relationships, including navigating transfer deals, contractual nuances, and managing diverse stakeholder interests. Additionally, the analysis extends beyond the surface portrayal of agents as mere dealmakers, shedding light on the multifaceted responsibilities they undertake and their broader impact on the football landscape. The examination contributes significantly to the understanding of the business side of football negotiations and transfers, making it essential reading for those interested in this aspect of the sport (Geey, 2019).

Agents and representatives in football serve as crucial facilitators for players, especially foreign athletes, as they adjust to new clubs and countries. They act as intermediaries, aiding in logistical aspects like housing and immigration, negotiating contracts, and managing media interactions. Additionally, they offer support in resolving disputes and providing emotional guidance, ensuring players' well-being and focus on the game. Beyond their roles in transfers and contracts, agents play a vital part in players' adaptation process, highlighting the comprehensive support network essential for their success in professional football (Miller 2021, 55-70).

3.7 Diversity and Women's football

Female foreign football players entering the male-dominated football world confront a range of challenges, including gender bias, cultural adaptation, and language barriers. The deeply entrenched stereotypes portraying football as a male domain contribute to skepticism and discrimination against female players, limiting their opportunities. Cultural differences in training methods and team dynamics further complicate their adaptation process, while societal expectations regarding gender roles may lead to resistance. Additionally, language barriers hinder effective communication both on and off the field, posing obstacles in understanding instructions and navigating administrative tasks within the sport. Despite these challenges, female foreign players must exhibit resilience and determination to navigate the complexities of the male-dominated football environment and pave the way for change and progress (Garcia 2023, 45-60),

Female foreign players in countries with less developed women's football face challenges due to disparities in facilities and resources compared to men's football. Despite these obstacles, their presence in male-dominated environments contributes to the evolution of women's football and challenges gender stereotypes. Players like Helena Costa and Tiffany Weimer exemplify success and re-

silence in overcoming adversity. Their stories inspire a new generation of female athletes and contribute to the integration of women in football, breaking down traditional barriers and promoting recognition of women's contributions to the sport (Smith 2023, 75-88)

4 ADAPTATION IN KUPS

In the world of sports, helping new players from different countries fit into their teams is crucial for success. At KuPS, I take on a special role as the Head of Player Adaptation, dealing with the unique challenges these players face. My work is more than just coaching; it involves making sure they feel welcome, have a place to stay, know their way around the team's schedule, and get help with their paperwork and even money matters. I aim to make them comfortable so they can do their best, boosting the team's spirit and achievements. I noticed some areas where we were not doing enough to help foreign players adjust to the team at KuPS, and I felt I could help to fix this. These kinds of gaps exist in the sport industry, but I wanted to make sure every player felt supported and ready to excel, regardless of where they come from. By tackling these challenges, my goal was to build a stronger, more cohesive environment that could reach higher levels of success together. So, besides being a coach, I also focus on helping new or foreign players blend in smoothly with the rest of the team. This role means I handle what they need to start off on the right foot, ensuring they feel part of the team right from the start.

First and foremost, upon their arrival in our city, depending on the availability of the group of 3 that take care of the new arrivals including me, I personally greet the players at either the airport or the train station. This initial encounter serves as the starting point for their journey with the club, and it sets the tone for their entire experience. Following their arrival, my next responsibility is to transport them to their predetermined accommodation, which has been pre-arranged to offer them a comfortable and welcoming environment.

As the 1st team assistant coach, I take it upon myself to familiarize these newcomers with our team's weekly schedule for their first week. This orientation is critical for helping them settle into their new roles within the club. I ensure that they are aware of training times and locations, as well as any special arrangements that might be in place.

However, it is essential to recognize that the schedule is not set in stone. Adaptability is key, especially in situations where a player needs to undergo a medical examination, which can be scheduled immediately upon their arrival or the day after. This flexibility is necessary to address the unique needs of each player.

What makes me particularly suited for this role is my extensive experience in Europe, and especially in Finland, where I have developed a deep understanding of the processes and challenges that foreigners face when relocating. This includes navigating the bureaucratic maze of immigration for residence permits, liaising with the tax office to obtain the necessary tax cards, coordinating with apartment rental companies for accommodation, and handling various insurance matters. Additionally, I am well-versed in arranging essential services such as internet connections in their accommodations and coordinating with utility and building companies for their basic needs. In my role, I am dedicated to ensuring the well-being and comfort of the players by offering a range of support services. To address their religious needs, I provide guidance on the locations of designated prayer areas, ensuring that players have convenient and accessible spaces for their religious practices. Recognizing the importance of mobility, I also assist in facilitating car rentals, ensuring that the players

have reliable and comfortable transportation options during their stay. Moreover, I strive to enhance their overall experience by directing them to local shops that offer Asian or African products, thereby enabling them to access familiar items and ingredients. Additionally, I go beyond the immediate necessities by highlighting various shopping destinations, including malls and boutique stores, to cater to both recreational and basic shopping needs. Through these efforts, my aim is to create a supportive and accommodating environment for the players, allowing them to focus on their performance while seamlessly navigating their day-to-day activities in the city.

In essence, my role extends far beyond the confines of the football field. I remain actively involved with the players on a variety of fronts related to their adaptation, ensuring that they feel at ease and are equipped with the resources and support they need to settle into their new environment. This holistic approach underscores my commitment to their overall well-being and adjustment to life in a new country.

It is worth noting that all these responsibilities that I shoulder as part of my role at KuPS are not only beneficial for the players but also play a significant role in my own personal and professional development. The skills and insights I have gained through this role have not only enhanced my coaching abilities but have also given me valuable experience in the realm of Human Resources. My multifaceted role as Head of Player Adaptation has proven to be an enriching and essential component of my career in football, contributing to the holistic development of the organization KuPS, the players, and myself.

5 RESEARCH

The research sets out to examine and evaluate the adaptation process of foreign football players within the context of KuPS Kuopion Palloseura, aiming to enhance performance, foster resilience, and promote overall growth in the sports industry. It seeks to achieve this by critically assessing existing adaptation strategies and proposing refinements to increase their effectiveness and impact. In doing so, the study acknowledges the global appeal and cultural diversity inherent in football, recognizing the significance of adaptation across diverse sectors. By focusing on the challenges and opportunities presented by adaptation, the research endeavors to provide valuable insights and guidance for professionals in the international sports industry.

To enrich the research on professional athletes' adaptation processes, particularly football and American football players from KuPS Kuopion Palloseura and Kuopion Steelers, a qualitative methodology through individual interviews is employed. This approach is informed by existing literature on adaptation processes, migration in sports, and the unique challenges foreign athletes face, drawing on theories of human adaptation and organizational management. The purpose is to capture the nuanced, personal experiences of these athletes, offering insights into their emotional journeys, challenges, and the strategies they use to adapt to new environments and cultures.

The structure of the interviews is carefully designed to extract deep insights into athletes' adaptation experiences. The questionnaire is organized into sections: Background Information, Adaptation Experience, Performance and Well-being, and Future Adaptation and Reflection. Each section is aimed at understanding different facets of the athletes' experiences, focusing on their sports history, the challenges of adapting to new environments, their performance, and well-being, along with their reflections on future adjustments.

Background Information

First, it gathers essential information about the athlete's sports history, which assists interviewers in understanding the athlete's professional background and sets the stage for a more detailed discussion.

Adaptation Experience

Next, it dives into the athletes' adaptation experiences, asking about the hurdles they have faced when moving to a new club or country and how they have managed these challenges. This part is essential for understanding the difficulties athletes encounter and the support they find helpful during their transition.

Performance and Well-being

The third section examines how adapting to new environments affects athletes' performance in their sport and their overall happiness and mental health. It aims to explore the link between how well they adjust and how they perform and feel, both mentally and physically.

Future Adaptation and Reflection

Finally, the questionnaire encourages athletes to think about their ongoing adaptation processes, any personal growth they have recognized, and any advice they would give to others facing similar transitions. This reflection helps to understand the continuous nature of adaptation and its role in personal development.

In summary, the questionnaire is designed to capture a comprehensive view of an athlete's journey through adaptation, highlighting the support needed and gained, the impact on their career and well-being, and the insights they can share with others embarking on similar paths. The literature review supports the choice of method and structure by providing a theoretical framework on adaptation that spans several contexts, including sports. For instance, various sources discussed in the literature review emphasize the multifaceted nature of adaptation, involving psychological, cultural, social, and environmental dimensions. This comprehensive view underscores the importance of exploring athletes' personal experiences and emotions to understand fully the adaptation process within the sports industry.

By integrating these theoretical insights with practical, structured inquiries, the study aims to contribute significantly to the field of sports management and human adaptation. It seeks not only to enhance academic understanding but also to provide actionable guidance for sports organizations and professionals working to support athletes in their adaptation journeys. Through this research, the goal is to foster a more inclusive, supportive, and effective environment for athletes navigating the challenges of adapting to new cultural and professional contexts. Furthermore, the research aims to connect its findings with the broader narrative of football migration and cultural exchange within the global sports landscape. By examining the adaptation experiences of foreign players at KuPS and Kuopion Steelers, the study hopes to shed light on broader trends and patterns in sports migration, highlighting the role of adaptation in shaping the success and integration of athletes in new environments. This broader perspective not only enriches our understanding of human adaptation in sports but also provides practical insights for clubs, coaches, and sports administrators seeking to optimize the adaptation process for foreign players. Ultimately, the research aspires to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding diversity, inclusion, and excellence in the world of football.

The interviews were conducted with a total of six professional athletes, consisting of five football players from KuPS Kuopion Palloseura and one American football player from Kuopion Steelers.

6 FINDINGS

6.1 Adaptation Experience

Adapting to life at KuPS presented a multitude of challenges for the athletes, ranging from weather-related difficulties to language barriers and cultural adjustments. The cold and snow-covered environment was a significant challenge for Player 1 upon arrival, while Player 2 struggled with the stark contrast between the Finnish climate and his warmer homeland. For Player 3, the differences in facilities presented a challenge to overcome. Despite these varied hurdles, each athlete found ways to navigate their adaptation process.

Specific situations that tested their resilience included language barriers hindering communication with teammates and coaches, as well as the struggle to acclimate to solitary living away from friends and family. Despite these challenges, the athletes employed strategies such as effective communication, leaning on their support systems, and maintaining a positive mindset to overcome them. For example, Player 4 emphasized intense focus during training sessions, while Player 5 developed routines to cope with homesickness and the emotional strain of being away from family.

Throughout their adaptation journeys, the athletes received crucial support from the coaching staff, fellow players, and the organization. From offering guidance on team style to assisting with administrative tasks like paperwork, the support provided by the club played a vital role in easing their transition. Additionally, the prevalence of English among players facilitated communication within the team, helping to bridge language barriers.

Language and cultural barriers were common themes among the athletes' experiences, with some relying on Google Translate or seeking assistance from teammates who spoke their language. Despite initial challenges, gradual acclimation to Finnish culture and norms allowed them to integrate better into both the team and the local community. While some found it challenging to integrate outside of the club due to the reserved nature of the Finnish people, others found comfort in the welcoming public environment and established friendships within the community.

Overall, the athletes' adaptation experiences at KuPS highlight the resilience, determination, and support systems necessary to thrive in new environments. Through perseverance and a willingness to embrace challenges, they were able to overcome hurdles and find success both on and off the field.

6.2 Performance and Well-being

The athletes' adaptation journeys at KuPS have undeniably influenced their on-field performance and overall well-being in various ways. For instance, Player 1's initial challenges with the cold climate and language barriers could have potentially impacted his performance, but his ability to adapt and integrate into the team environment quickly helped him maintain a positive mindset and focus on his gameplay. Similarly, Player 2's determination to overcome language barriers and adjust to the unfamiliar climate allowed him to excel both on and off the field, contributing to his personal and professional growth. Both Player 1 and Player 2 have been helped immensely by the team's assistant coach Issa Thiaw with better and effective communication with the staff and teammates off the

field and during trainings and matches. Player 3's positive experience integrating into the team and utilizing coping mechanisms like frequent communication with loved ones helped him maintain his mental well-being and enhance his performance on the pitch.

Throughout their adaptation journeys, the athletes encountered instances where their transition positively or negatively affected their game. For example, Player 4 faced challenges aligning with the team's style of play midway through the season, but effective communication and trust in his abilities helped him overcome these obstacles and maintain his performance levels. On the other hand, Player 5 grappled with the emotional weight of being away from his family, which occasionally affected his game, but he found solace in routines and support systems to manage stress and maintain focus on the field.

Managing stress, homesickness, and emotional challenges associated with adaptation required diverse strategies and support systems for the athletes. Some, like Player 2, found comfort in the unwavering support of family and friends, while others, like Player 3, utilized nature and outdoor activities to alleviate stress and maintain mental well-being. Player 4, despite being away from home, drew strength from regular contact with his family and utilized the support provided by the club to navigate emotional challenges associated with adaptation.

Overall, the athletes benefited from a range of resources and support systems that played crucial roles in maintaining their mental and emotional well-being during the transition period. From the support of family and friends to the assistance provided by the coaching staff and organization, each athlete found unique ways to cope with the challenges of adaptation and thrive both on and off the field. Their adaptation journeys highlight the importance of resilience, determination, and support systems in navigating new environments and achieving success in professional sports.

6.3 Future Adapdtation and Reflection

As these athletes reflect on their adaptation journeys and look towards the future, several common themes emerge regarding ongoing adaptation, personal growth, and advice for future players.

Firstly, many athletes acknowledge that aspects of their adaptation process are ongoing or may require further adjustment. For instance, Player 1, despite feeling settled in his current environment, understands that language barriers still exist beyond the football field and may continue to pose challenges in local interactions. Similarly, Player 6 acknowledges that learning Finnish fluently remains a final step in his adaptation journey. This recognition suggests that adaptation is a continuous process that extends beyond the initial stages of settling into a new environment.

Secondly, these athletes have experienced significant personal growth and gained valuable insights from their adaptation journeys. Player 2, for example, views his experience at KuPS as a tremendous opportunity for personal and professional growth, shaping him into a better individual and motivating him to strive for continued improvement. Player 4 reflects on the valuable lessons learned from diverse cultures and challenges faced, emphasizing the role of his adaptation journey in his transition to adulthood. These insights highlight the transformative power of facing and overcoming challenges in unfamiliar territories.

Finally, the athletes offer valuable advice to future players joining KuPS or any football club in a new environment. Player 2 emphasizes the importance of embracing every opportunity, giving their best daily, and facing challenges without fear. Player 4 encourages future players to ask for help, observe others, and back their abilities to facilitate quicker adaptation and better on-field performance. Player 6 advises proactive efforts to connect with locals, respect for diverse cultures and beliefs, and embracing discomfort for personal growth. This advice underscores the significance of resilience, determination, and openness in communication when navigating new environments.

In summary, these athletes' reflections on future adaptation and their insights gained from their adaptation journeys emphasize the ongoing nature of adaptation, the transformative power of facing challenges, and the importance of resilience and openness in communication for success in unfamiliar territories. Their experiences and advice serve as valuable lessons for future players embarking on similar journeys in the world of professional football.

7 COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR ATHLETE'S ADAPTATION

7.1 Challenges

Ryba, Stambulova & Ronkainen (2016) explored how athletes navigate the complex process of adjusting to a new culture when moving abroad for their careers, identifying three distinct phases in this journey. The journey begins with the pre-transition phase before the move actually happens. Athletes take this time to gather information about the country and region they will be moving to. This phase is critical for athletes as they start opening up to the idea of immersing themselves in a completely new culture. Gaining knowledge about their future home aids in their psychological preparation, setting the stage for a smoother transition.

After arriving in the new country, athletes enter the acute cultural adaptation phase. This period can be particularly challenging as feelings of loneliness often surface due to the sudden immersion in an unfamiliar environment. Athletes strive to adapt to the new cultural norms during this phase, which might lead to confusion and questioning of their own identity. This is a critical period where athletes grapple with their sense of self in relation to their new surroundings (Ryba et al 2016).

The journey culminates in the sociocultural adaptation phase, marking the athletes' successful adjustment to their new life. In this final phase, athletes achieve a harmonious balance between their original cultural background and the local cultural norms of their new country. This balance brings a sense of contentment and fulfillment, enabling athletes to feel at home both in their sport and in their day-to-day social interactions (Ryba et al 2016).

Ryba, Schinke, Stambulova & Elbe (2018) highlighted that for international athletes to adapt well, it is crucial for them to actively try to fit into the new culture and for their new teammates and coaches to take an interest in the athlete's original culture. This two-way process, known as shared acculturation, involves everyone participating in activities that encourage cultural exchange. When acculturation is one-sided, with only the athlete making the effort, it often leads to the athlete feeling isolated. This isolation can happen when they face stereotypes and other difficulties, causing them to feel unhappy and putting a strain on the resources of the sports organization. In such situations, whether an athlete stays with the team depends largely on their personal strength and ability to cope with these challenges.

7.2 Strategies

Before making a decision on which team to join, it is important to gather basic details about the team, the coaches, the supporters, and the culture of the club or university. You should look into things like the typical weather conditions year-round, whether you can find your preferred foods in the new city or town, where you might live, and how you will get around. Talking to current team members about what it is like to be part of the team can provide valuable insights. Additionally, try to connect with athletes from your home country who have moved to play in the country you're considering. This preparation will not only help you pick a place that suits you well but also make it easier for you to adjust once you get there (Ryba et al 2016).

It is very important to be opened to new experiences and differences when moving to a new country, especially for athletes joining teams abroad. It highlights that one can expect to encounter people who think, act, and live differently. This includes everything from their personality traits to their cultural practices, values they hold dear, and even their understanding of personal boundaries. For someone moving internationally for sports, understanding and embracing these differences is crucial for a smooth transition. A specific example given is the concept of personal space, which is a clear illustration of how cultural norms can differ. In some cultures, close physical proximity is normal and expected, while in others, more space is preferred. Athletes need to be aware of these differences to avoid misunderstandings and to feel comfortable in their new surroundings. If the idea of personal space is particularly important to an athlete, doing research beforehand becomes even more vital. Knowing what to expect and being prepared to adapt or discuss one's needs can help in navigating this aspect of cultural adjustment. Moving to a new country for sports is about more than just playing the game in a different place. It involves engaging with and adapting to a new cultural setting. Athletes are encouraged to research and mentally prepare for these differences, including the norms around personal space, to make their transition as smooth as possible. Being open-minded and ready to adapt not only helps in overcoming initial cultural shocks but also in building positive relationships with new teammates and the broader community. This preparation and adaptability are key to thriving in an international sports career (Ryba et al 2016).

When athletes move abroad to play sports, they often face tough emotional challenges. Feeling overwhelmed, alone, and not quite like themselves are common experiences at the beginning. It is very important for these athletes to lean on their support networks during these times. Staying in touch with family and friends from home, along with building new relationships at the club or university, can make a big difference. Talking to professionals like Certified Mental Performance Consultants (CMPC) or mental health practitioners can also be a big help. Sometimes, just having someone to talk to can reduce feelings of being overwhelmed and alone, paving the way for athletes to adjust to their new life and sport in another country (Ryba et al 2019).

8 SOLUTIONS

In the realm of professional sports, particularly in football, the successful adaptation of foreign players is crucial for both individual and team success. Adapting to a new environment, especially in the context of professional sports like football, is a multifaceted process that requires careful attention to various factors. Recognizing that adaptation is an ongoing process, clubs should provide continuous support to foreign players throughout their tenure.

The solutions proposed are most likely tailored not just with a global perspective in mind but also with a specific focus on the unique context of Finland and the Veikkausliiga, particularly centering on the KuPS Kuopion Palloseura Oy team. This approach ensures that the strategies for adaptation and integration of foreign players are relevant and effective within the specific cultural, social, and professional environment of Finnish football and the operational dynamics of the KuPS team.

It is crucial to have a good **Comprehensive Support Systems**. Why ?

Football clubs often sign players from different parts of the world. To help these foreign players adjust to a new country, clubs are starting to create special support systems. A key part of this system is having dedicated staff, like a Head of Player Adaptation. This person's job is not about teaching football skills but helping players with everything else in their new life.

The Head of Player Adaptation and their team help with many things. They help find places for players to live so they feel comfortable in their new home. They also assist with all the paperwork that comes with moving to a new country, like visas and work permits, which can be very confusing. Learning the local language is another big part of what they do. Speaking the language makes it easier for players to understand their coaches and teammates, shop for groceries, and do normal things in their community.

Cultural integration is important, too. The support staff teach players about the local customs and traditions to help them fit in better with their new surroundings. This can include anything from local dining etiquette to public transport tips. Lastly, they provide support for the players' mental well-being. Moving to a new country can be stressful, and having someone to talk to about these challenges can make a big difference.

By offering this kind of personalized help, football clubs can make sure their foreign players get used to their new environment more quickly and comfortably. This support helps players focus on football because they worry less about the other parts of living in a new country. When players feel happy and settled off the field, they are more likely to perform better on the field. Thus, creating a comprehensive support system within football clubs is crucial for helping foreign players adapt. With dedicated staff to guide them through the process, players can tackle the challenges of moving, such as finding a home, dealing with paperwork, learning a new language, understanding the culture, and maintaining their mental health. This tailored approach ensures that players can fully concentrate on their game, contributing to the team's success both on and off the pitch.

Drawing from the insights provided in the thesis, own experiences, and external references, several key strategies emerge to facilitate the successful adaptation of football players in the sports industry.

Financial and Legal Assistance

When athletes move to another country to play sports, they face unique financial and legal challenges. Understanding and managing these challenges is essential for their success and peace of mind, both on and off the field. This is where specialized financial planning services and legal assistance tailored for athletes come into play.

Financial planning for athletes often focuses on how to manage their earnings wisely. Given the potentially high earnings but sometimes short career span in professional sports, athletes need guidance on investment strategies, saving for the future, and budgeting. Equally important is understanding the tax laws of the country they're moving to. Different countries have different tax rates and rules, especially for foreign athletes. Financial planning services help athletes navigate these complexities, ensuring they maximize their earnings while complying with local tax regulations.

Legal assistance is equally critical for athletes moving internationally. The process involves securing the right visas and work permits, which can be complicated and vary greatly from one country to another. Missteps in this process can lead to delays or even the inability to compete legally. Furthermore, athletes must understand the local laws that affect their daily lives and careers, such as those related to endorsements, contract negotiations, and personal conduct. Legal services tailored for athletes provide the expertise needed to navigate these issues effectively, ensuring that athletes can focus on their sport without legal distractions.

For athletes, the peace of mind that comes from having their financial and legal affairs in order cannot be overstated. It allows them to concentrate fully on their training and performance, secure in the knowledge that their off-field affairs are being handled by experts. This holistic support is crucial for athletes adapting to a new country, helping them to make the most of their international careers.

In conclusion, the financial and legal challenges of moving to a new country for sports are significant but manageable with the right support. Financial planning services help athletes make informed decisions about their finances, taking into account the intricacies of international tax laws and investment opportunities. Legal assistance ensures they navigate the complexities of immigration and local laws smoothly. Together, these services are invaluable for international athletes, enabling them to focus on what they do best: excelling in their sport.

Pre-arrival Preparation

Sports clubs often bring in players from different countries, which can be a big change for these athletes. To help with this, clubs can set up programs before the players arrive, known as pre-arrival orientation programs. These programs give players important information about the club they will be joining, the city or region they will live in, and the cultural differences they might face. This way,

players can start getting ready for their move before it happens, making the transition smoother for them.

The main goal of these programs is to make sure players do not feel lost or overwhelmed when they arrive in a new country. It includes teaching them about the local way of life, what they can expect in their new home, and even simple things like where to shop or how to use public transportation. Clubs might also include language lessons if the player is moving to a country where a different language is spoken. This is very helpful because understanding and speaking the local language can make a big difference in how quickly a player feels at home.

Another important part of these programs is introducing the players to the culture of the club and the expectations there. Every sports club has its own culture and way of doing things, so knowing this ahead of time can help players adjust faster when they start training and playing with their new team.

Pre-arrival orientation programs also focus on building a sense of community. They might connect new players with current players or staff who can answer questions and offer support. Sometimes, they arrange for new players to meet each other or set up buddy systems so they have a familiar face right from the start.

In summary, pre-arrival orientation programs are very useful for sports clubs and their foreign players. They provide essential information and support to help players adjust to a new country, culture, and club. By reducing the shock of relocation, these programs help players focus on their sport more quickly, leading to better performances on the field. These programs show players that the club cares about them, not just as athletes but as people, which can make a big difference in how happy and successful they are at their new club.

Cultural Familiarization Programs and Communication Support

For foreign players joining a new sports team, getting used to a new country can be tough. Football clubs are now seeing how important it is to help these players feel at home. One way they're doing this is through cultural familiarization programs. These programs are designed to help players understand the culture they're moving into. They cover everything from the local language to everyday customs and behaviors.

Language classes are a big part of helping players adjust. Knowing the local language makes a huge difference. It helps players communicate better with their team, the staff, and people in the city. This can be about understanding tactics and instructions on the field, as well as simple things like ordering food or asking for directions. Some clubs go further by providing personal tutors or translators. This can be especially helpful in the beginning when players are still learning the language.

Cultural orientation sessions are another key element. These sessions teach players about the local culture, from national holidays and traditional foods to social norms and expected behaviors. This knowledge helps players feel less like outsiders and more part of the community. It can also prevent misunderstandings that come from cultural differences.

Mentorship programs pair new foreign players with experienced players who have been through the adaptation process. These mentors can share their own stories and tips, offering advice on everything from dealing with homesickness to finding the best places to live. Having a mentor who understands what it is like to move to a new country can make the transition much smoother.

In short, football clubs are creating environments where foreign players can quickly feel at home. By focusing on language learning, cultural orientation, and mentorship, clubs are not just improving team cohesion but also helping players integrate into their new community. These efforts ensure that players can focus on their game without being held back by language barriers or cultural misunderstandings, leading to a happier and more productive team overall.

Family Support Networks

Recognizing the importance of family in players' lives, clubs can extend support beyond the players themselves to include their families. Offering assistance with family relocation, schooling for children, and access to community resources can alleviate the stress of adaptation for players and their loved ones.

When athletes relocate to join a new team or move to a different city, the change impacts not just their professional life but also the lives of their family members. Sports organizations have recognized the importance of supporting these families through the transition, offering a range of family support services. These services are essential because they significantly reduce the stress associated with moving. For instance, finding the right school for children in an unfamiliar city can be challenging. Family support services provide crucial assistance by offering information about local schools and helping with the enrollment process.

Moreover, these services make sports teams more attractive to potential and current athletes. They demonstrate that the team values the well-being of the athlete's family, not just the athlete's performance. This supportive environment can be a key factor for athletes when choosing which team to join. When athletes know that their families will receive help to settle into the new environment, they can focus more on their sport, leading to better performance.

The assistance offered by these services is comprehensive. It includes help with finding housing, integrating into the community through cultural classes and social events, and providing emotional support. Access to counseling services can be particularly valuable for family members who find the transition overwhelming.

For these services to effectively meet the needs of athletes and their families, it is vital for sports organizations to engage with the families to understand their needs and experiences. This feedback allows organizations to tailor the services to be more beneficial. Collaborating with local schools, businesses, and other community resources can enhance the support provided, ensuring it addresses the practical and emotional needs of relocating families.

In summary, family support services in the sports industry play a crucial role in easing the transition for athletes and their families. They cover a broad spectrum of needs, from logistical to emotional, ensuring the family feels supported throughout the move. This comprehensive approach not only

helps the family adjust to their new environment but also enables the athlete to concentrate on their career, knowing their loved ones are well taken care of. This, in turn, can improve the athlete's performance and satisfaction with the sports organization.

Social Integration Initiatives and Community Engagement Initiatives

Encouraging players to engage with the local community through volunteer work, charity events, or cultural exchanges fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance. By becoming active participants in their new community, players can forge deeper connections and feel valued beyond their roles on the field. Promoting social integration initiatives within football clubs can help foreign players build meaningful connections with teammates and the local community. Clubs can organize team-building activities, cultural exchange events, and community outreach programs to facilitate interactions and foster a sense of belonging. Creating opportunities for players to engage in shared experiences outside of training and matches can strengthen team cohesion and support players' adaptation efforts.

Psychological Support Services and Mental Health Awareness Programs

Providing access to psychological support services is crucial for addressing the emotional challenges associated with adaptation, such as homesickness, stress, and anxiety. Clubs should offer confidential counseling services and mental health resources to support players' emotional well-being throughout their adaptation journey. Additionally, fostering a culture of openness and destigmatizing discussions about mental health issues can encourage players to seek help when needed. Implementing mandatory mental health awareness programs educates players and staff about the importance of mental well-being and equips them with coping strategies for stress, anxiety, and depression. Destigmatizing mental health discussions encourages players to seek help when needed, promoting overall resilience and adaptation.

Continuous Feedback Mechanisms, Evaluation, and Improvement

Establishing regular feedback mechanisms, such as anonymous surveys or focus group discussions, allows players to voice their concerns, suggestions, and experiences related to adaptation. Actively soliciting and responding to player feedback demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement and ensures that support services remain responsive to players' evolving needs throughout their adaptation journey. Regular check-ins with players and open communication channels demonstrate a commitment to their well-being and adjustment. Continuously evaluating and refining adaptation strategies is essential for optimizing players' experiences and outcomes. Clubs should solicit feedback from players, coaches, and support staff to identify areas for improvement and implement necessary adjustments. Regular assessments of adaptation programs and initiatives can help clubs stay responsive to players' evolving needs and ensure ongoing success in facilitating adaptation.

Integration Events and Activities for Families

Football clubs often bring together players from many different countries and cultures. To help these players feel like part of the team and the local community, clubs can organize special events.

These events are not just fun; they are important for helping players and their families get to know each other and learn about their new home.

Team dinners are a simple but effective way to start. Sharing a meal is something many cultures do, so it is a great way for players to bond. They can talk, laugh, and learn about each other's backgrounds in a relaxed setting. This helps create a strong team spirit because players who enjoy each other's company off the field tend to work better together on the field.

Clubs should not forget about the players' families. Moving to a new country can be hard for spouses and children too. Family-friendly outings, cultural excursions, and social gatherings give families a chance to meet and make new friends. This is important because when a player's family is happy and settled, the player is more likely to feel content and focused on their football.

In summary, organizing regular events for players and their families is a smart move for football clubs. These events help everyone get to know each other, learn new things, and feel part of a community. This not only makes the team stronger but also helps players and their families adjust to their new life more easily. It shows that the club cares about them, not just as athletes but as people, which can make a big difference in how well they adapt and perform.

Professional Development Opportunities

Offering professional development opportunities, such as career counseling or educational scholarships, demonstrates a commitment to the long-term success and well-being of foreign players. These opportunities empower players to pursue personal and professional growth beyond their football careers, enriching their lives both on and off the field.

In the world of sports, especially football, the career of a player does not last forever. Knowing this, it is important for football clubs to offer professional development opportunities. These opportunities can include career planning and skill development, which are essential for helping players prepare for life after their sports career ends.

Career planning is all about helping players think about their future beyond playing football. Some players might want to stay in the sports world as coaches or sports analysts, while others might want to explore completely different careers. By providing career counseling and guidance, clubs can help players set goals for their life after football and start working towards them. This kind of support makes players feel more secure, knowing they have a plan for the future.

Skill development is another key area. Apart from improving football skills, clubs can offer training and education in other areas. This could be anything from taking courses on financial management to learning about sports medicine. These skills are valuable and can open many doors for players once they retire from professional play. Continuous learning also helps players to grow personally and professionally, enriching their lives both on and off the field.

In summary, by focusing on professional development, football clubs show they care about the long-term success and well-being of their players. Career planning helps players to envision and prepare for their future, while skill development offers them the tools to succeed in whatever path they choose next. These efforts not only benefit the players individually but also strengthen the club by

fostering a culture of growth and support. This approach ensures that players can enjoy a fulfilling career during and after their time in professional football.

9 CONCLUSION

This thesis delves into the complexities of adaptation in professional sports through the lens of KuPS Kuopion Palloseura football team, offering a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and triumphs foreign players face as they navigate new cultural and professional terrains. By focusing on the multifaceted nature of adaptation, from the initial recruitment and integration processes to the ongoing support mechanisms that foster player well-being and team cohesion, the study illuminates the critical role that effective adaptation strategies play in the success of sports organizations.

The research underscores the global phenomenon of football player migration and the imperative for clubs like KuPS to not only scout and recruit talent from around the world but also to ensure their successful integration into the team and local culture. The unique position of the Head of Player Adaptation at KuPS exemplifies a pioneering approach to supporting foreign players, highlighting the club's recognition of the human element in sports and its profound impact on performance and team dynamics.

The research adopts a qualitative approach and through interviews with professional athletes from both football and American football backgrounds, the study offers nuanced insights into the personal experiences of adaptation. These narratives reveal the importance of comprehensive support systems that address not just the professional, but also the personal challenges players face, from language and cultural barriers to the emotional toll of relocation.

The findings of this thesis advocate for a holistic view of adaptation in the sports industry, emphasizing the need for continuous, personalized support for foreign players. It proposes a series of practical solutions aimed at enhancing the adaptation process, including comprehensive support systems, cultural familiarization programs, effective communication strategies, and psychological support services. These recommendations are not only pertinent to sports management professionals but also contribute to the broader understanding of human adaptation in various sectors.

In conclusion, this thesis not only enriches our understanding of adaptation within the context of professional sports but also sets a blueprint for future research and practice in sports management. By shedding light on the nuanced experiences of foreign players at KuPS, the study highlights the profound impact of effective adaptation strategies on player well-being, team performance, and the overall success of sports organizations. The insights and recommendations offered herein serve as a valuable guide for clubs, coaches, and sports administrators worldwide, underscoring the importance of fostering an environment that supports the holistic development and success of athletes in the global sports arena.

10 DISCUSSION

Thinking about how I made my thesis and what it involved is a key part of understanding all the complex details in academic research, especially on tough topics like how athletes from other countries adjust in professional sports. Working on this thesis, especially about the KuPS Kuopion Palloseura football team and Kuopion Steelers team, has taught me a lot but also had its hard moments. It really showed me the many different ways foreign players experience changes when they join professional sports teams.

Writing this thesis was like going on a big adventure, full of tough and exciting parts. The journey started with a lot of reading to find a special topic that nobody else had looked into much before. The goal was to learn how these football players adapt to a new team in a new country. It was a big task to find all the right information and figure out what question to answer with the study.

The next big step was to talk to the football players themselves. This was not easy because it was important to make them feel safe and comfortable enough to share their personal stories. It meant listening carefully and being trustworthy, so they would feel okay talking openly.

Then came the tricky part of looking at all the stories and notes from the interviews to find common themes and important messages. This took a lot of time and effort, going over the information again and again to make sure nothing important was missed.

In the end, writing up the thesis meant putting all these findings into a clear and interesting story that other people could understand and learn from. This had to be done in a way that was detailed enough and also clear for anyone else interested in the topic.

So, this whole process was like putting together a big puzzle, from finding the right pieces (the unique topic and interviews) to putting them all together (analyzing the data and writing it all down). It was a mix of hard work, learning a lot, and finally sharing new insights about how football players adapt to new teams and countries.

Despite these challenges, the process was immensely rewarding. It offered an opportunity to contribute new knowledge to the field of sports management, particularly regarding the adaptation of foreign athletes in professional teams. The research highlighted the importance of a holistic approach to player adaptation, one that considers not just the athletic but also the personal and cultural dimensions of moving to a new country to pursue a career.

The thesis journey was a profound exercise in academic rigor, personal growth, and professional development. It provided valuable lessons in research methodology, data analysis, and the art of academic writing, all while focusing on the important topic of how athletes adapt in professional sports. The challenges faced along the way were not just obstacles but opportunities for learning and growth, ultimately enriching the research experience and contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of adaptation in the world of professional sports.

However, it is important to remember the limits of this research, especially because I worked at KuPS during the project and some players were still there, which means I had to be careful about keeping certain informations confidentials.

When conducting research, it was critical to recognize its limitations, particularly where personal or professional connections might influence the findings. In my case, during the research project at KuPS, I faced a unique challenge due to my association with the team. This connection required me to be especially cautious about the information I disclosed. My ongoing relationship with some of the players meant that certain data had to remain confidential to protect their privacy.

The need to maintain confidentiality significantly restricted the details I could provide. For instance, while analyzing the performance data of the players, I could not reveal specific statistics that might identify individual players or disclose sensitive team details. This restriction was not just a personal choice but a professional obligation to uphold the integrity of the research and the privacy of the individuals involved.

Moreover, these constraints influenced how I interpreted the results of my study. It was crucial to strike a balance between providing a thorough analysis and not compromising the confidentiality of the data. Therefore, while I aimed to draw meaningful conclusions from the data, I had to ensure that these findings did not expose any sensitive information that could affect the players or the organization adversely.

Therefore, working under these limitations was challenging but necessary. It required a careful approach to both the analysis and presentation of the research findings, ensuring that the insights gained were shared responsibly. This experience highlighted the importance of ethical considerations in the research, especially when dealing with human subjects and sensitive information.

Future research could benefit from involving a more diverse group of participants, including athletes from various sports and different countries. It could involve recruiting athletes from a variety of sports and countries. This broader scope would help in understanding if the findings from one sport or country apply more universally and help to understand if different sports or cultural backgrounds affect how athletes adapt.

Another valuable approach would be to monitor athletes over a longer period. This longitudinal study would provide insights into how athletes adapt over time and what factors contribute to their long-term success or challenges when settling into their new environments.

It is also important to examine the specific effects of different types of support systems on athlete adaptation. Research could also delve deeper into the role of various support systems. Detailed analysis of how support from family, teammates, coaching staff, and wider community impacts athletes during various stages of their careers could identify which supports are most beneficial at different times.

Additionally, comparing how athletes adapt in different sports organizations and cultural settings could uncover best practices and innovative methods for supporting foreign athletes. This comparative research could lead to improved strategies across sports disciplines and locations, enhancing the overall support framework for athletes as they navigate new environments.

These expanded research areas could greatly enhance our understanding of the psychological challenges and support mechanisms vital for the successful adaptation of foreign athletes in sports.

Regarding the use of AI, like chatGPT, it played a role in various stages of the thesis. It helped in the initial research phase to understand the topic better and during the analysis of interviews by organizing themes and findings.

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APPENDIX 1: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Background Information

This section collects essential sports history details and helps interviewers to understand the athlete's professional journey up to the current point.

How long have you been with the current club (KuPS)?

Could you describe your initial impressions and emotions when you arrived at KuPS and your new environment?

Adaptation Experience

What were the most significant challenges you faced when adapting to the new environment at KuPS?

Can you share specific situations or moments that were particularly challenging during your adaptation?

What strategies or coping mechanisms did you employ to overcome these challenges?

How did the coaching staff, fellow players, and the organization support you during your adaptation process?

Were there any cultural or language barriers you had to navigate, and if so, how did you address them?

How have you felt about integrating into the local community outside of the club? Were there any memorable experiences or challenges in this regard?

Performance and Well-being

How do you think your adaptation process has influenced your on-field performance and overall well-being?

Have there been instances where your adaptation journey has positively or negatively affected your game?

How have you managed stress, homesickness, or emotional challenges associated with adaptation?

What kind of resources or support systems have been most valuable in maintaining your mental and emotional well-being during this transition?

Future Adaptation and Reflection

Looking ahead, what aspects of your adaptation process do you feel are ongoing or require further adjustment?

Can you identify any personal growth or insights you've gained from this adaptation journey?

If you could give advice to future players joining KuPS or any football club in a new environment, what would it be?

APPENDIX 2 : THE ANSWERS

Player 1 (2023), a player from a European club, joined KuPS in 2023, arriving in a cold and snow-covered environment. His initial challenges at KuPS were weather-related, notably the snow, and compounded by language barriers as he did not speak English. However, having an assistant coach who spoke French helped bridge the communication gap with the rest of the team. Despite language difficulties, he found football to be a universal language, which facilitated his integration into the team. He felt welcomed from the start, attributing this positive environment to the coach and teammates who went out of their way to include him. However, outside the club, language remained a barrier, especially in local interactions like visiting restaurants, where he relied on pointing at menu items due to language limitations. Regarding performance and well-being, his adaptation naturally progressed through attentive listening to the coach's guidance and integrating these instructions into his gameplay. Stress was managed well, partly due to personal challenges in life that motivated him to excel during his arrival at KuPS. Looking ahead, he feels settled in the current environment and does not foresee significant changes. His advice to future players emphasizes the importance of listening to the coach's instructions, integrating into the new environment, and adapting to the challenges that come with the territory. In reflecting on his adaptation journey, his challenges predominantly revolved around language, which hindered interactions beyond the football field. However, the welcoming nature of the team and the universal language of football eased his integration within the club. His personal motivation and dedication to perform well also contributed significantly to his mental well-being during this transition.

Player 2 (2023), his arrival in KuPS brought a whirlwind of emotions, as everything was entirely new and unlike anything he had experienced before. Adapting posed challenges, primarily due to language barriers and the cold climate, which starkly contrasted with his origins. Communication hurdles with teammates and coaches initially made integration difficult, yet his unyielding determination and desire to win kept him motivated throughout. Despite the language difficulties, the warmth and patience of his clubmates played a pivotal role in easing his transition. Over time, he gradually acclimated to both the language and the environment, initially finding it challenging to venture out but eventually becoming more familiar with the surroundings. The unwavering support of patient individuals, combined with his family and faith, helped him navigate the challenges. His family's presence and supportive friends significantly contributed to maintaining his mental and emotional well-being. Reflecting on his experience, he sees it as a tremendous opportunity for personal and professional growth. He believes this experience has not only enhanced his professional capabilities but has also shaped him into a better individual, motivating him to strive for continued improvement and potentially return to Europe someday. Offering advice to future players joining new environments, he emphasizes embracing every opportunity, giving their best daily, and facing challenges without fear. His journey showcases the resilience needed to adapt to a new culture, the significance of patience and support, and the transformative power of perseverance and dedication in overcoming obstacles on and off the field.

Player 3 (2023), his initial impressions upon arrival highlighted differences in facilities compared to his previous clubs, yet he felt a positive impact on his football development within KuPS' environment. Adaptation presented language barriers, although English fluency among club members helped him integrate more smoothly. While acclimating to solitary living was a challenge, his coping mechanisms involved frequent communication with friends and family. Support from the coaching staff and club members proved instrumental, particularly in assisting with administrative tasks like paperwork. The prevalent use of English at the club eased cultural and language barriers, contributing to seamless integration within the team. Outside the club, he found solace in nature, enjoying walks amidst the Finnish greenery. Reflecting on performance and well-being, he highlighted the positive influence of his adaptation on and off the pitch. He noted how his adaptation positively affected his gameplay, attributing his comfort and confidence as significant factors in his success. Coping with stress involved maintaining communication with loved ones and adopting a work-oriented mindset. His personal growth emerged from his routine, enabling him to approach each day with focus and readiness. His advice to future players emphasizes the importance of active participation, building relationships within the team, and striving for personal bests daily. Overall, his journey showcases how adaptation, supported by a positive mindset and communication, has facilitated successful integration into KuPS both on and off the field.

Player 4 (2024), his initial emotions were a mix of excitement, nerves, and anticipation for the challenges that lay ahead. Although meeting new teammates made him a bit nervous, he was pleasantly surprised by the high standard of training and the professionalism exhibited by the players. Adapting midway through the season posed challenges, particularly in quickly aligning with the team's style of play. He had to adapt swiftly and cope with playing a game after just one training session. Employing strategies such as effective communication, intense focus during training, and trusting his abilities were crucial in overcoming these challenges. The coaching staff, teammates, and the organization played vital roles in supporting his adaptation, offering detailed guidance on team style and making him feel part of the team right away. Language was not a significant barrier as everyone could communicate well in English, but being a Muslim athlete presented some challenges initially, which were alleviated by the presence of another Muslim teammate and coaching staff member. Integrating into the local community outside of the club was not extensive due to Finnish people's reserved nature, but he found comfort in the respectful and welcoming public environment. His smooth transition significantly impacted his on-field performance and overall well-being. The club's support in providing accommodation, guiding him around the city, and the familiarity of experienced teammates eased his settling-in process. Fortunately, he did not experience negative impacts on his game or well-being during the adaptation process. He managed stress by maintaining contact with his family and drawing strength from their support. Looking forward, he feels good with his adaptation journey and does not foresee any adjustments, valuing the support received from all his previous clubs. Reflecting on his personal growth, he acknowledges the journey's role in his transition to adulthood, emphasizing the valuable lessons learned from diverse cultures and challenges faced. For future players joining new clubs, he encourages asking for help, observing others, and backing one's abilities to facilitate quicker adaptation and better on-field performance. His adaptation journey portrays the importance of support systems, effective communication, and personal confidence

in navigating new environments, shaping a smoother transition into unfamiliar territories both on and off the pitch.

Player 5 (2024), brings a vast repertoire from his extensive professional background, including stints in various clubs across different countries, and currently at KuPS. His return to football at KuPS was met with excitement and having competed against several of his new teammates in the past. Familiar with the process of settling into new club environments, he eased into the changing atmosphere, carefully observing before immersing himself into deeper interactions. The primary challenge he faced upon arrival at KuPS was the emotional weight of being away from his family. Despite prior experiences, the absence after training sessions was consistently challenging. To address this, he developed a routine of hitting the gym, spending time with teammates over coffee, or finding solace in working remotely at a local coffee shop. Language barriers, while not entirely new due to previous stints abroad, still posed an adjustment. However, the prevalence of English among players facilitated communication within the team. Yet, integrating into the local Finnish community beyond the club remained reserved but welcoming upon interaction, reflecting the Finnish cultural tendency to maintain personal space. Reflecting on how his adaptation impacted his on-field performance and overall well-being, he noted a positive correlation between emotional stability and his game. His family's visit coincided with an exceptional game performance, highlighting the significance of emotional support in his well-being and on-field prowess. Managing stress and homesickness involved keeping busy and maintaining regular contact with family and friends, primarily his wife, along with a consistent gym routine. Looking ahead, he feels relatively settled into the club's environment and has found profound personal growth in embracing the present and cherishing life's experiences. His advice to incoming players emphasizes engaging in positive tasks like gym routines, studying, and fostering strong bonds with teammates for smoother integration. His narrative captures the emotional toll and resilience required in adapting to a new club environment, underscoring the delicate balance between emotional well-being and on-field performance. His journey exemplifies the challenges and learnings inherent in such transitions, portraying the dedication and adaptability demanded of athletes in such situations.

Player 6 (2024), joined Kuopion Steelers experiencing a mix of excitement and curiosity about the new culture and team environment in Finland. His initial impressions were positive, yet he noticed a reserved nature among the Finnish players, making social interactions initially challenging. Adapting to Finland presented multiple challenges, including language barriers, navigating the cold weather, and bridging the gap between international and local players. Learning Finnish-specific words, leveraging Google Translate, and proactively approaching Finnish teammates facilitated integration. Over time, he successfully connected with local players and found ways to motivate the Finnish players during games, although this remained a gradual process. The coaching staff, fellow players, and the organization were supportive, offering assistance with accommodation, paperwork, and general guidance. The team's cultural norms, such as reserved greetings, required adaptation, a shift from his cultural expectations, but he gradually acclimatized to these differences. Outside the club, he integrated well into the local community, establishing friendships and even finding a long-term

partner, contributing to his decision to settle in Finland post-career. His on-field performance remained unaffected by the adaptation process due to a cohesive international player group that provided companionship and support. Managing stress involved solitude, meditation, fishing, and regular calls with family to combat homesickness. Nature, fishing spots, and the gym served as vital resources for mental and emotional well-being. His adaptation journey, which has reached a comfortable stage, anticipates the challenge of learning Finnish fluently as a final step. This journey has prompted significant personal growth, emphasizing the importance of openness in communication despite a preference for solitude. For future players entering new environments, he advises proactive efforts to connect with locals, respect for diverse cultures and beliefs, and embracing discomfort for personal growth. His story reflects the resilience required to adapt to new surroundings, emphasizing the importance of proactive integration efforts and the value of personal growth in unfamiliar territories.