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SPONSORING IN MEN'S PROFESSIONAL ICE HOCKEY

Case: Oulun Kärpät

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<p>This thesis studies sponsoring in men's professional ice hockey. The aim of the research was to suggest improvements for sponsoring management of Oulun Kärpät and the Finnish League. Oulun Kärpät plays in the Finnish League. Finnish League is a professional men's ice hockey league. Oulun Kärpät is one of the biggest and most successful ice hockey clubs in Finland. This research is from the viewpoint of the sponsored party, Oulun Kärpät. The results of the research are exploited by designing development suggestions for sponsorship for Oulun Kärpät.</p> <p>The research was made by using qualitative research methods. Theme survey was created for three Finnish League ice hockey clubs. The survey was sent to the interviewees via email. Two ice hockey clubs answered the survey. Interviewees were contacted to get objective results about sponsor management. The interview answers were transcribed and downloaded to iCloud.</p> <p>The research indicated the main problems in sponsorships in men's ice hockey are the large number of sponsors which has a negative affect on the overall image of Finnish League and the rules set by Finnish League concerning sponsoring. Lowering the number of sponsors and having main sponsors who are sharing most of the financial responsibilities was found as a solution. This would bring Finnish League its much needed change and get the Finnish League back to being one of the top ice hockey leagues in Europe. By improving communication and creating specific sponsorship packages to offer the sponsors can help to develop already existing relationships between the sponsored party and the sponsor.</p> <p>By having a larger number of interviews with sponsor organizations and sponsored parties more generalizations can be made. Comparing sponsorships in the Finnish League to the National Hockey League new development possibilities can be found. An interesting view point for further research would be from sponsor organizations.</p>			
Keywords Ice hockey, men's professional ice hockey, sponsorship, Oulun Kärpät			

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1 INTRODUCTION

Men's ice hockey is the most popular sport in Finland. The circumstances to play ice hockey in Finland are favorable. The geographical location and cold climate are one of the reasons why ice hockey has been so popular. Generations have played ice hockey on pond and keep doing so still. There are not many sports that creates such an emotional bond. Ice hockey plays a big part in Finnish identity and in Finnish culture. (Suomikiekko 2017) Even though being to most popular and followed sport in media, most of the teams playing in the Finnish league, Liiga, are operating loss annually or if the teams are barely making profit, thanks to it belongs to sponsors and patrons. Liiga is also going through changes. Trying to find its place with other European ice hockey leagues and at the same time, support its teams. (YLE 2018) This research is aimed on finding solutions to how to improve sponsor management in a Finnish men's ice hockey teams.

This research will focus on the viewpoint of men's professional ice hockey, which makes it interesting to examine because professional sports are business. This research will be made on the point of view of the sponsored party, the ice hockey team Oulun Kärpät. The results of the research are aimed for two ice hockey clubs who participated in the research. The main focus is on the one case company, Oulun Kärpät. The results cannot be generalized nationally.

The thesis subject was selected because of the researchers own interest in ice hockey and sports marketing. The topic is familiar for the researcher because of her several years interest on following the sport and the case company. This intrigued the researcher to study the ideas how to make Liiga more appealing in the European markets and how Oulun Kärpät could differentiate from teams in Liiga.

1.1 The aim of this research

The aim of this thesis is to search new ways to do sponsoring and expanding the recruitment process with new or already existing sponsors of Oulun Kärpät. The thesis cannot be reflected to culture sponsoring since in this research the main focus is on sponsorships between a men's ice hockey team and organization.

The subject is examined with the help of literature, articles, interviews and by observations and analysis by the researcher. The focus is on Oulun Kärpät, but one other team is used as an example. One of the viewpoints is on how the recruitment process has changed during the years and what are the challenges teams face when they are recruiting sponsors. Sponsor contract are often one year long but ideas are brought up on how the one-year contracts could be turned into longer-term contracts.

The main research problem of the thesis is: how to develop sponsorships so that it is beneficial for both Oulun Kärpät and Liiga. The answer to the main problem is found by combining the answer of other research problems:

- What is the most common way to sponsor in men's ice hockey?
- What are the different development possibilities in sponsorship in men's ice hockey teams?
- What are the new trends in sponsoring?

These questions were chosen as the research questions in order to gain knowledge about sponsoring and its current form in men's ice hockey in Finland and to get an idea what will happen in the future. The results of this research can be used to deepen the already existing sponsorships and get a fresh idea of what could be done changed, made better and create added value for both parties.

After introductions, which includes the base information about the research, aims, viewpoints, introduction of the sport and the current situation of men's ice hockey in Finland, sponsoring is introduced. Sponsoring chapter includes the definition of the term, different forms of sponsoring, sport sponsoring, sponsoring in Finland and problems sport sponsoring has faced. The third chapter introduces the Finnish league, the case company, Oulun Kärpät. Next the sponsoring in Oulun Kärpät is introduced and to get an idea of a different kind of sponsoring, National Hockey League and sponsoring in the NHL are introduced. The fourth chapter discusses the sponsoring opportunities for the case company and presents the research method used and quantitative research. Next research limitations and principles are listed. The fifth chapter introduces viewpoints of the interviewees about sponsoring. The last chapter is about conclusions, development suggestions and evaluation of the whole research process.

1.2 Men's ice hockey in Finland

A modern-day ice hockey started in Finland relatively late, at the end of the year 1920. In North America, ice hockey started around 1890s and in Europe, ice hockey got its association form when International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) was established in 1908. (Liiga 2016)

The Finnish Ice Hockey Association was established in 1929. Albeit the fact that the equipment's and skills were poor, ice hockey gained popularity gradually in Finland. Enormous improvements were made when, first in Tampere in 1956 and in Helsinki in 1958, transferred to synthetic ice rinks. In 1973, ice hockey had altogether become an indoor sport. (Liiga 2016)

In 1960 ice hockey superseded bandy as the most popular winter sport. The media attention that ice hockey gained after television arrived in Finland, established its status. In 1975 SM-league was founded. (Liiga 2016)

The first Finnish ice hockey players who played in World Hockey Association league, WHA, in 1974 was Veli-Pekka Ketola and Heikki Riihiranta. These two players opened the way to North America for Finnish players. Matti Hagman got drafted in the National Hockey League (NHL) in 1975 and started to play in the NHL as the first Finnish ice hockey player in 1976. Pentti Lund played in the NHL in 1946-1948 and in 1951-1953 but moved from Finland to Canada in his early years and played in the

NHL with his Canadian passport. Lund has won the Calder Memorial Trophy, which is an award that is given to the most proficient first year player, a Rookie, of the year. Teemu Selänne and Pentti Lund are the only Finnish players that have received Calder Memorial Trophy. (YLE 2013) Pekka Rautakallio was the first Finnish ice hockey player who got invited to the NHL All Stars game in 1982. Two years later Jari Kurri won the Stanley Cup in 1984 and ended up winning the Stanley Cup five times. Other Finnish player that has won the Stanley Cup five times is Esa Tikkanen. Exponentially NHL teams became fascinated with Finnish ice hockey players. This raised the level of Finnish ice hockey markedly in 1980, and the SM-league became professional league. (NHL 2017)

The biggest news of 1990s was about Teemu Selänne, also known as the Finnish Flash, and the first world championship victory in the Finnish ice hockey history in 1995. Teemu Selänne is considered being the best Finnish ice hockey player and in his rookie season he scored 76 goals, which is still an NHL record. Selänne is named one of the 100 greatest NHL players and was elected to Hockey Hall of Fame with Jari Kurri. 12 different Finnish ice hockey players have won the Stanley Cup. (NHL 2017)

Junior hockey has been a talked subject for decades in Finland. The Finnish league teams are investing progressively on successful junior hockey organization. Teams have realized that they can save large amounts from their budget by training junior players and taking them to play in the Finnish Liiga teams. This way, teams do not have to spend large amounts of money to purchase players outside of their organization. It benefits the players as well; young players will gain experience in playing professional ice hockey. National Hockey League is willing to draft even younger players which means Finnish fans are not able to enjoy watching new, young Finnish stars playing in the Liiga. New obstacles have risen because young players, who wish to play in the NHL, are told to leave Liiga and move to more compelling leagues in Europe or move to United States to play in the minor leagues. National Hockey League scouts are not appreciating the Finnish league like they did back in the old days, early 2000 to 2016. The fact is that the Liiga does not offer future NHL stars enough experience. (YLE Areena 2018)

Liiga has been one of the best leagues in Europe. Now the Russian league, Kontinental Hockey League, KHL, has risen to its own level and cannot be compared with other European leagues. Ever since 2016 professional leagues in Sweden, Switzerland and Czech Republic are more popular than the Finnish League, when in early 2000 Liiga was clearly the second-best ice hockey league after the NHL. The drastic change happened when Liiga closed in 2013, meaning that no one can enter or drop from the league if they end up last in the score board. This does not offer dramatic and exciting games in the Liiga. The game has become boring because teams do not have to fight for their spot in the Liiga. Fans get bored and sponsors pull out. This is not the case in other European leagues. Fans watch and follow sports because it is an entertainment, but what happens to entertainment when fair competition is taken out of that equation? It becomes boring. Opening the Liiga would bring the excitement of the entertainment back. (Elmomedia 2019) Fans are not alone with the idea that Liiga needs to be opened, professional players think so too. The biggest problem

is that the game identity and the business/entertainment identity needs to be understood in a way they can be combined. (YLE Areena 2018)

The Generation Z has lived in a completely different decade than the Millennials and Generation Y. Liiga has massive challenges, and other leagues as well, on how to attract the new generation. Is the Liiga able to offer the excitement previous generations have gotten from buying tickets and going to the games? E-sports have gained massive success in Generation Z, can Liiga keep up and compete with new sports. Liiga has taken out the real competition which is the reason for other European leagues gaining excitement. Liiga should focus on how to make Finnish ice hockey more compelling in the future than focusing on giving different statistics to fans and trying to attract them that way. (Elmomedia 2019)

2 SPONSORING

This chapter focuses specifically on sponsoring and sponsoring in the NHL and in Finland. The definition of sponsoring is introduced and then the different forms of sponsoring. The chapter continues with sponsoring in the NHL and in Finnish league. Lastly the problems and challenges sponsoring may contain are presented.

2.1 Definition of sponsoring

Sponsoring has nowadays a bigger role in athletic marketing than ever. Sponsoring liaisons are a keen part for companies to gain competitive advantage. In the business world, the word athletic marketing might be more used than sponsoring. In this research sponsoring and athletic marketing mean the same, marketing something with the use of competitive sports. Sponsorship is the most efficient way of athletic marketing. Marketing stabilized itself as a part of sports in Finland in 1990, when marketing was the only way for sports to have a competitive advantage in unstable markets. Athletic marketing can be split into two categories, avocation marketing and public marketing. This paper is concentrating on the public marketing aspects. (Alaja 2001, 15)

The Cambridge Dictionary defines sponsorship as "the act of providing money for a television or a radio program, website, sports event, or other activity in exchange advertising". (Cambridge Dictionary 2020) Other definition mentioned on the Cambridge Dictionary is "the act of supporting a person, organization, or activity by giving money, encouragement, or other help". (Cambridge Dictionary 2020) Oxford Dictionary defines a sponsor as "a person or organization that pays for or contributes to the costs involved in staging a sporting or artistic event in return for advertising". (Oxford Dictionary 2020)

Alaja and Lipponen (2000) have determined that sponsoring which takes place in a sporting event can be defined as an organization's way to communicate with the target group by using the sport event as to create a positive image. When an organization decides to become a sponsor, it is a part of the organization marketing communication. For the sport event which is being sponsored, is creating competitive advantage and offers a competitive weapon from the co-operating company. Organization can sponsor an athlete, sport event, sport club, television program which shows sports or anything else related to sports. (Alaja 2001, 23)

Advertising is direct communication, sponsoring is indirect communication. Sponsoring is not advertising. (Alaja 2001, 29) Sponsoring is about two parties, the sponsor organization and the sponsored party, beneficial co-operation. The sponsor organization uses the positive image of the sponsored party to benefit its own marketing communications. The sponsored receives funds or other material benefits from the collaboration. Both parties benefit from the collaboration but in a different way. (Alaja 2001, 23) Sponsoring is not charity, charity is defined by the Oxford Dictionary

as "a help or money given to those in need. (Oxford Dictionary 2020) Sponsorship, when done correctly, is always beneficial for both parties and it will start by listing the possibilities of how one organization can benefit from the sponsored party. Sponsoring may be long-term or short-term. Long-term sponsoring will build meaningful and rewarding relationships. Short-term sponsoring deals can be great tactical moves to promote something new to a new target group. The down side to short-term sponsoring is that it is less memorable. Individuals tend to remember an organization because it has sponsored a sport event for years. Short-term sponsoring is more promotion than sponsoring. (Marketing Society 2001)

The biggest motives for an organization to become a sponsor is to gain more brand awareness (Alaja 2001, 24). Organizations prefer the word co-operation instead of the word sponsorship to avoid any confusion with the word charity. Organization what to receive something in return for its financial support which is why the word charity is not suitable to describe the act between an organization and the sponsored party. (Valanko 2009) In this research the words 'sponsoring', 'co-operation' and 'collaboration' are used as synonyms.

2.2 Reasons for sponsoring and choosing a sponsored object

Both parties must understand other's standpoints (Alaja 2001, 24). The sponsor organization must have a clear vision why are they looking to sponsor someone or something. When the organization has come to a conclusion of why they are looking for sponsoring, the missions are easier to achieve. An organization should not sponsor just to sponsor someone, which in Finland is often the case. An organization feels a need to sponsor its local ice hockey team to keep them in the league, but it is not in any way beneficial to the organization if they do not have vision and mission set up for the sponsoring co-operation. Every marketing person in the organization should be aware of the reason why are they sponsoring. (Alaja 2001,25)

Most organizations are looking to create a bond between the product they wish to promote and the event or a team they are sponsoring. Reaching the target market by using sponsoring is often cheaper and more efficient than using any traditional marketing communication tools. The collaboration might open direct or indirect business opportunities. There are also possibilities for an organization to find business partners from other sponsor organizations. (Valanko 2009)

Sponsoring can help to create a face and a soul for the organization, in a way they would not be possible without the collaboration. Sponsoring is a way for the organization to transmit positive news concerning the organization and build its brand identity. (Alaja 2001,26)

First step always comes from the sponsored party. In NHL the case is different where most of the teams are the ones receiving the sponsoring requests. The multinational organization receive sponsor requests daily. Multinational companies have created a specific sponsorship charts where they can clearly see if the object is suitable for the organization co-operation. Long-term and short-term sponsoring is listed on the organization charts, letting the marketing people know what sort of

a contracts the organization is looking for. Some multinational organizations are only interested at being the main sponsors, nothing less. (Alaja 2001, 26)

The process takes time. A month is very short time for creating a sponsor collaboration. Organizations take time to see if the sponsored object has the same values and does the long-term goals match. Knowing the facts of the sponsored objects image, reputation, target markets, media coverage, trends and many other facts help a lot in the decision-making process. Risk factors are major forces that may affect negatively on choosing the sponsored object. The danger of the sport, doping possibilities and violence can easily turn the sponsors head to the other direction. Doping and violence has made organizations to have strict definition of policies. (Alaja 2001, 26, 27) Many doping scandals involving a few players from the Russian ice hockey team in the 2019 IIHF world champions games and a couple Russian NHL players have caused multinational organizations in Russia to withdraw their sponsoring contracts to avoid negative publicity. (RTR Sports Marketing 2018)

Creativity is also recognized in sponsoring. Energy drink companies and ice hockey is a good example of a natural image of sponsoring. The product, meaning the energy drink and an ice hockey teams reference value is well suited for collaboration. This does not always have to be the case. Using your creative mind can open endless possibilities in field that no one had thought. (Alaja 2001, 26) Success in competitions is a significant criterion for sponsor organizations. Success as a concept is fading and becoming more transforming, fair play and ethnicity are nowadays part of success. (Alaja 2001, 27)

Both parties need to agree on everything mentioned in the contract. The length of the contract, often in ice hockey team sponsored the length of the contract is one season, it is rare to have contracts that are less than one season. The length of season is every game that is played in the regular season, the contract needs to specify playoffs and final games separately. In many cases, if a team makes it to the playoffs, sponsor organizations can be expected to give a specific amount of financial support to the team, but all of these cases must be written in the contract. (Alaja 2001, 28)

2.3 Sponsoring forms

There are plenty of opportunities for sponsoring. The models of sponsoring can be divided into: main sponsorship, side sponsoring, co-branding, project sponsoring, media sponsoring, functional sponsoring, Pro-bono partnership, licensed purchase, product sale and product license contracts. (Valanko 2009, 66) The model which is used in sponsoring very from the needs of both parties. What the sponsored party is able to offer, do they have already the main sponsor or are they looking for side sponsors and what the sponsor organizations is willing to accept, are they only interested at working as a main sponsor or for short-term project sponsorship. (Vuokko 2002)

Main sponsor can often be identified by the visual appearance of their logos. The ones that are most visible in the players jerseys or at the Game Center. The main sponsors offer the biggest

financial benefits from all of the sponsors and the main sponsors receive special treatments from the sponsored party. The number of main sponsors vary but the recommended number of main sponsors at the same time is less than five. The more specific treatments the sponsor organization will receive, the less main sponsors there are. The goal for many organizations is to be the only main sponsor of the, in this report, ice hockey team. Main sponsors can be divided into main sponsors and official partners. This gives the team the availability to have more so-called main sponsors. (Alaja 2001, 55)(Valanko 2009, 51)

The NHL has five main sponsors, or global partners, as they are listed on the NHL website, are Adidas, Apple, Electronic Arts (EA), O.R.G packaging and SAP (NHL 2019). Adidas supplies all the game jerseys used by the teams. This differs from the usual arrangement because often the organization who provide the gears are side sponsors. The main sponsor terms are longer-term than other sponsors and, in many cases, the amounts in the contracts are so valuable that they are considered more partners than sponsors. (NHL 2019)

Side sponsoring or official partners are organizations which, in many cases, are the suppliers of the gears used by the athletes. Side sponsors have the exclusive rights to supply the needed gear for the team. This must be agreed by both parties and it needs to be listed on the contract. In many cases the organization which provide the gears (for example harnesses and sticks) are side sponsors. Side sponsors are in equal position with other sponsors. (Valanko 2009, 51)

Co-branding or co-sponsoring are variations of main sponsoring and side sponsoring. In co-branding the main sponsors and the side sponsors create a scenario where smaller, equal co-sponsors promote and support the organization. This way of sponsoring is often seen done by Museums and Galleries. The organizations must establish a joint contract which allows co-branding. (Valanko 2009, 51)

Project sponsoring is a type of sponsoring that occurs, as the name points at, in projects. The duration of the sponsorship will depend on the project itself but is from the start of the project until the end. (Valanko 2009, 51)

Hulu was the sponsor of the 2018 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs and Finals sponsor. Hulu had stated that the company would only be interested at project sponsorship and received to rights to be the official sponsor of the Stanley Cup Playoffs and Finals. This is becoming more common in the NHL, companies are interested at sponsoring a special event throughout the season. (Medium 2018)

Media sponsorship allows the sponsors to receive contractual media visibility. Often media sponsorship is associated with television, but it can also be radio or magazines. Global media sponsorship is expensive and difficult to get but are extremely beneficial for both, the sponsor organization and the sponsored object. These might be the Olympics or the IIHF world championship games. (Valanko 2009, 52)

Functional sponsoring which refers to logical and natural form of activity in a project. The project can be associated with products, services or action. Functional sponsorship is long-term and continuous. Often occurs in local communities. In sports, functional sponsorship can be co-operation between an athletic clothing company and an athlete itself. This is natural and logical sponsoring where no one will question the meaning behind it. (Valanko 2009, 52-53)

Pro-Bono partnership refers to interaction where a sponsor organization gives support and help to the sponsored party instead of financial support. Pro-bono partnerships are becoming more and more common. The support and help can be for example consulting, financial management and legal advice. It is help in work performance. Pro-Bono partnership is closer to donation than sponsoring, because the sponsor organization is not waiting anything for return. (Valanko 2009, 53)

License purchase is based on a widely known multinational organization selling the use of the organization's logos to a sponsor. The sponsor will pay for the usage of the trademarked logo to the organization. The sponsor can use the logo to enhance its own marketing communication. (Valanko 2009, 54)

Product selling is for organization who are looking to sponsor in big events. This is suitable for sponsors whose products fit for the event audience in the right way. The sponsorship is natural and logical at the same time. (Valanko 2009, 54)

License contract means that a product, logo or character is licensed for the sponsor. The sponsor can use the licensed product in its own marketing communication and sales promotion. The sponsor can improve its brand awareness with a well-known product and brand identity. (Valanko 2009, 54)

The most common sponsoring form is a mixture of all forms mentioned above. Sponsored party has to make an effort to offer a creative mixture of different forms of sponsoring from its own point of view. There is not absolute wrong or absolute right sponsoring form. (Valanko 2009, 55)

2.4 Sponsoring in sports

The connections between sports and economy have become more noticeable overtime. Sponsoring has grown when sports became more professional. Nowadays, competitive sports could not aim success without sponsors. Sponsoring has always been a part of sports, and sponsoring can be traced all the way to the Ancient Olympics, where Olympic athletes had own funding agencies. The object in sport sponsoring can an individual athlete, a sports club, a team, an event or a sport. The main three reasons for sport sponsoring are networking, branding and social responsibility. (Alaja 2001)

NHL is a billion-dollar business. The revenue received from ticket sale won't even cover the operating costs of a team, let alone the salaries of the players. Not in the NHL nor in Liiga. This is where sponsor organizations enter the sport business. For teams, co-operation with a sponsor is

essential for economic reasons but for the sponsor organization co-operation creates new business opportunities and enhance image. (Centre for Sport Business 2015)

The sponsoring we know today, started spreading fast from the United States of America in 1970's to Europe and Japan. Global sport events, such as the Olympic Games and Fédération Internationale de Football Association, FIFA, World Cup tournament attracted, especially, organizations involved in the consumer good markets to be sponsors because of the media attention these events have. The cost of sponsoring the Olympics or FIFA World Cup is extremely expensive and often only few multinational organizations are able to afford it. Organizations realized the positive impact on sponsoring a sport or a team, organization started to sponsor smaller, local sports. This led to smaller, often fewer known sports to become professional sports. (Valanko 2009, 26-27)

The sponsorship between Nike and basketball player Michael Jordan is one of the most successful sponsorships between an organization and an individual athlete. This partnership made Michael Jordan one of the world's most recognized athlete and Nike became the world's dominant sport clothing and shoe store. This is a great example of co-operation done correctly. Nike can host events in its stores where Michael Jordan attends and interact with customers and store employees while promoting Nike. Athletes can also promote the sponsor organization by posting something about the brand on their social media before a big game. (Business Insider 2018)

The growth in sports economics is going to increase in the future. As the data gets better and teams are able to compare themselves with the help of statistics. (The Conversation 2017)

2.5 Sponsoring in Finland

More than half a million Finnish volunteer work in sports clubs and other sporting events. For example, it can be work in the cafes, being a security guard or a ticket inspector. Almost every chairman and secretary in a sport club does volunteer work as well. (Alaja 2001, 19) This is occurring simply because there is not enough money to pay for ticket inspectors or security guards. Even with sponsors, sports rarely make profit in Finland. There are three professional level ice hockey clubs in Finland which are profitable. To compare, there are 25 teams in the NHL which were profitable and six teams which are non-profitable in 2017/18 season. (Statista 2019) NHL and the Finnish league are not comparable. We are able to receive some statistics but due to the size, money and population differences, those statistics are not reliable.

Sponsoring grew rapidly in Finland in 1980's, mainly due to television. Television has been one of the reasons for sports to gain such a massive market share in sponsoring. It allows organizations to reach new audience and create exciting conversation about the brand and its mission. (Open sponsorship 2016)

The reason behind the problem is not that Finnish people do not know how to sponsor, or organizations sponsor clubs just so to keep them going and preventing bankruptcy so that there

would be sport clubs in cities. This is true in some cases but mostly the reason is that improvement takes time. There is lack of resources and knowledge which are slowing the improvement of sponsoring in Finland. (Jatkoaika 2019) One of the problems is that organization still connect sponsoring as a form of charity. Those organizations which have been involved in sport sponsoring for a while are aware that sponsoring nowadays in Finland is far from charity, but there are still organizations which believe it's to be charity. (Alaja 2001, 19)

In 2017, 257 million euros was spent on sponsoring in Finland. According to Sponsor Insight 47 percent of organizations in Finland knowledge the importance of sponsoring and see the strategic benefit of it. In 2018 the amount of money spent on sponsoring was 248 million euros. Nevertheless, the amount of money spent on sponsoring decreased by 3,5 percent, the amount spent on sport sponsoring increased by 4 percent. For the year 2019 the amount of money spend on sponsoring is expected to rise, but the amount spend on sport sponsoring is expected to stay the same (Sponsor Insight 2018). For the first time in Finland the value of sponsoring was greater that the value of television marketing. (Jatkoaika 2019)

Social media has open new doors for sponsoring. Teams are including sponsors to their social media posts. New channels bring new sponsoring opportunities. With a right marketing team organization can reach domestic visibility. Coming up with fun competitions or different social media content can quickly spread on social media and even become viral and give the team and sponsor global visibility. Society responsibility is growing as well. Clubs need to show that they are putting an effort for society responsibility. This can be players visiting in nursing homes or taking part in pride. (Jatkoaika 2019)

Sports have a great economical effect. For example, sports play a part in export. When an international sports club buys a player from Finland, the compensations are paid to Finland. This can be more than million euros every year. (Alaja 2001, 19)

Sport sponsoring is the most popular way to sponsor in Finland. Particularly in men's team sponsoring; ice hockey, football, basketball etc. There are approximately 110 sponsors per team. The sponsored object does not have to be the most successful team in the city, the most important part is the the sponsored team know its audience. This way the sponsor organization knows immediately if they will reach their target market by cooperating with the sport club. The biggest sponsor organization in Finland is Veikkaus, a gambling organization. (YLE 2007)

2.6 Problems and challenges in sponsoring

Finland is steps behind its neighboring countries when it comes to sponsoring in sports, especially team sponsoring. Sponsoring is a relevantly new form of marketing. Norway and Sweden have had professional sponsoring for years and the sponsoring deals that are made are long-term and results are followed. This has only just begun in Finland. Negative incidents may have an effect on the image of the sport as well as the sponsor company. (YLE 2007)

Challenges in sponsoring is the possibility that sponsoring does not get as much visibility as the sponsor wanted or that sponsors are not aware of how much money should be used in sponsoring. Teams should reject the conventional short-term sponsoring and move to a modern sponsoring where both parties recognize the strategic role of sponsorship and the greater value form a long-term sponsoring brings. (Renard & Sitz 2011, 122) If the sports club does not success as well as expected, it can lead to decreased interest in media which means the sponsor does not get as much visibility they had hoped for. Sponsor should be aware of the negative incidents which may occur before starting a long-term sponsorship. Both parties have to be aware of what kind of publicity can be offered and ponder is that publicity what the sponsor is hoping to receive. (Valanko 2009)

Violence has no part in sport. Somehow it is still playing a big part in sports, especially in ice hockey. Sports combine the atmosphere of sports, healthy lifestyle, professional athletes and fans to share and the experience and the emotions. Violence does not belong to this equation. In the Finnish league, and other European main leagues, fighting is illegal in the game and violence such as tripping, high sticks and boarding are tries to put to minimum. (YLE 2007)

In this report we are focusing on Finnish league. There is not an organization in Finland that wish to be linked to a team that is not playing according to the rules when it come to violence and due to sponsoring your organization is connected to violence. The most popular newspaper company Helsingin Sanomat withdrew from sponsoring ice hockey team Helsingin Jokerit in 2013 due to violence and the number of dirty hits in a game. They did not want to be in part of violence in a game where it does not even belong to. When asked about the reasons behind most teams in Liiga are not profitable is the lack of sponsoring. The money sponsors bring in is indispensable. The problem is in Liiga as well, not just in the teams themselves. The Finnish league is closed league, meaning if you are the worst team in the league, you will stay in the league. A team can be the last team five years in a row and nothing happens. In an open league, the team that is the last on the score board has to play against the best team on non-professional league in Mestaruussarja, Mestis. This will make Liiga more interesting and exciting. Ice hockey will be more competitive, attract players abroad. Liiga closed in 2013 and has killed the excitement of the sport. If Liiga were to be open it would bring in more fans which equals to more money. Keeping the league open would attract more sponsors because it would bring back the feeling and drama of the sport. Liiga has been criticized for its decision not to open the league but there will be time the league has to be opened. (Elmomediala 2019)

In 1970s and 1980's tobacco industry got itself involved in sports. Over 15% of organizations involved in sponsoring in 1980 were in fact tobacco or alcohol organizations (Valanko 2009, 25). Tobacco companies made sport viewers associate tobacco with vibrant health of athletes instead of lung cancer and other illnesses caused by tobacco products. With the help of sport sponsoring tobacco companies entered to the youth markets. In 2010 USA Federal Drug Administration, FDA, banned tobacco products from all sport sponsorships in the USA. In 2005 European Union Directive banned tobacco advertising and sponsorship in 27-member countries. (Crompton 2014, 7)

Alcohol companies are still major sponsors of sports. The reason for beer companies involved in sport sponsoring was explained; No one drinks more beer than a sports fan and no one likes sports better than a beer drinker. Often young males are the target audience of beer companies and is the reason they keep sponsoring sports (Crompton 2014, 8). In Finland alcohol company's logos are not allowed to be seen on under 25-year-old athletes. A loop hole has been found since alcohol company Hartwall says they sponsor a team, not any individual players. That is why you can see a Hartwall logo on a under 25 years old players jersey. Hartwall sponsors Euro Hockey Tour (EHT) and International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) world championship tournament (IS 2011). Liiga has banned alcohol company's logos from players under 17. This includes every player in Liiga, players over 18 years can have an alcohol company logo on their jerseys (Ylioppilaslehti 2001). It has been estimated that ice hockey receives annually 2 million euros in Finland from beer sponsorships. Juho-Pekka Vuorinen previous CEO of Liiga mentioned that without beer sponsorships the Finnish league would lose its star players abroad. (YLE 2016)

3 SPONSORING IN THE FINNISH LEAGUE VS. NHL

Modern day Liiga was established in 1975 to replace the old Finnish league. Liiga works separately from the Finnish ice hockey association. Thereby clubs were independent to make decisions regarding their own minds. SM-league acted fast. The league was founded in May, the first games were played in September. (Liiga 2016) Ten teams started in the league and at the moment there are 15 teams.

In early 2020's, Liiga is facing a lot of problems. Most of the teams that play in the Finnish league are financially unstable. Under half of the teams are making profit. Those teams that make profit are Oulun Kärpät, Tampereen Tappara, Lappeenranta SaiPa, and Helsingin IFK. These teams have plenty of own capital in compared to loans they have, also their solvency to manage short term loans are good. For the rest of the teams, it is not looking so good. Financially the weakest team in the league is Kuopion KalPa. The teams are able to have a positive financial year with the help of sponsors or so-called patronage's, who usually are millionaires and old NHL players, who are looking for supporting their old teams and the same time, they know the financial struggle and feel obligated to help their old teams. "In the most cases, pursuing success leads to financial struggle, luckily there are billionaires, whom get publicity and entertainment. Usually this is a win-win situation" said economist and investment writer Mika Hyttinen. A great sponsoring relationship is always a win-win-situation, and everyone is pursuing it (YLE 2018). Unfortunately, many teams in Finland have rely on patronages, wealthy owners keep many teams ongoing. Without patronage's or wealthy owners many teams are close to be bankrupt. (YLE 2018)

The smallest team, financially and population wise, in Sweden's professional ice hockey league, Svenska Hockeyligan, SHL, equals to the biggest, financially wise, team in Liiga. This already shows how much Liiga is behind SHL. (YLE Arena 2018) Of course, Finland is not the only country whose ice hockey leagues are facing financial troubles. The same formula is in every league in the world, just with a bigger scale. Helsingin Jokerit who are playing in the Kontinental Hockey League, KHL, are struggling with 50 million euros loss in four financial years. In Finland athletics are rarely profitable business. Teams are considered as a startup company. Teams need to be careful when it comes to a patronage relationship. Unfortunately, a patronage is sometimes the only way to keep a sports team running. It can change for the worse if a patronage wants to get involved with the playing style or lineups. It is understandable because one person has committed to a team financially and if the team is not succeeding. This happened with Helsingin Jokerit and its main owner Hjalmar Harkimo in the 1990s. Harkimo fired the coaching team for a poor success of the team and wanted Jokerit to play in the KHL. Success has been poor ever since Jokerit joined the KHL and are now in dept. After being the owner of the team for almost 30 years, Harkimo sold Jokerit and the new owner is a former NHL star Jari Kurri (YLE 2018).

There are limited number of sponsors for every team. A team cannot rely on the benefits they are going to receive from old NHL players, or if they are going to receive any at all. It is important the

teams themselves collect funds and are not relying on patronages. The difference between a sponsor and a patronage is that rarely patronage is aiming to get financial profit, it is more about the emotional experience that makes patron to give money for the teams. Ice hockey has such a strong status in Finland that a lot of people are willing to save the team, even if it would not be profitable. Without wealthy owners, the players level would not be as good as it now. Salaries are rising all the time. Players' salaries take the biggest part from the budgets. (YLE 2018)

Liiga has become a league where players can grow and learn about professional ice hockey before moving to Swedish, Russian or Swiss leagues. It is uncertain if Liiga is going to stay as it is and continue to produce young promising players or wants to take back its place as the top league in Europe. (YLE 2018).

3.1 Introduction of the case company, Oulun Kärpät

Oulun Kärpät's background was modest. The first ice hockey game played in the city was in 1949 and in the SM-series level, the team had three short, one season long, visits in the 1960s. In 1970s everything changed when the team started its well-known junior hockey league and Raksila's indoor hockey rink was opened. Oulun Kärpät joined the SM-league on spring 1977. (Liiga 2017)

The first SM-league championship was won in 1981 against Tampereen Tappara. Behind the victory was strong junior hockey league, from where five players were taken to play in the SM-league team. Later on, those five players had significant careers in the National Hockey League (NHL). In 1989, Kärpät was send back to minor league and come back to SM-league in 2000. (Liiga 2017)

After 23 years of waiting, Kärpät were a Finnish champion once again in 2003-2004. The 2003-2004 NHL lockout had major impact on SM-league. The last time NHL had a lockout was in 1994, and even then, players form the NHL had arrived in Europe right after NHL confirmed the lockout. The NHL players were expected to go back to North America in January but this time that did not happen. Gary Bettman, Commissioner, informed that the whole NHL season has been cancelled. At the end of the SM-league season, only two NHL players were playing in both final teams, Oulun Kärpät and Helsingin Jokerit. (Liiga 2018) Kari Jalonen, former NHL player, who was winning the first SM-league championship for Kärpät in 1981, was chosen to coach in 2004-2005 and he wanted to focus more on playing in the offensive zone rather than in the defensive zone. At this time Kärpät were dominating in the league. (Liiga 2018)

Kari Jalonen continued to be the head coach and season 2006-2007 team can be said to be the best team in the league. (Liiga 2018) The championship was third in four years. Kärpät became the team that others wanted to beat. Rise to Finland's top teams had been as fast as the fall to minor's league in 1980s. Competition in SM-league become more intense than ever before. (Liiga 2018) 2007-2008 Kärpät had been playing in the SM-league for eight seasons and had six medals in eight years. It was a dynasty from north (Liiga 2018).

After six years, Kärpät became a Finnish champion in 2013-2014. For the first time in the Finnish league championship was settled in game seven against Tampereen Tappara in overtime (Jatkoaika 2014). Kärpät decided to invest in players they were familiar before and leave the leagues expensive players for other teams. Of course, Kärpät had top players but they had a minor role when the team was assembled the first time. Foundation of Kärpät has always been rock hard assembly of players, sportiness and strict daily demand when it comes to playing. (Kaleva 2015) Players received their reward for the hard work next year when Kärpät was back to back champions in 2014-2015. For three seasons from 2013 until 2016, Kärpät relayed on tight, movable lines and the main focus was on defense. (Kaleva 2015)

For the seasons 2013-2016 the head coach was Lauri Marjamäki, who heavily relied on defense for three seasons and made defense the priority of the game. 2016-2017 Lauri Marjamäki left Oulun Kärpät to be the head coach of Finnish national hockey team, Leijonat. The new head coach was, for one season, Kai Suikkanen, which turned out to be a disappointment. Oulun Kärpät head coach from season 2018-2019 to season 2020-2021 was Mikko Manner, who has worked as an assistant coach in Oulu since 2013. For 2017-2018, Manner was chosen to be the head coach. The season ended better than expected, Kärpät won the championship once again. The team started the season as an underdog, they invested once again on Finnish players and had only a few new foreign players. After playing four years on strong defense emphasized style, Manner wanted to concentrate on playing fast hockey, taking examples from European leagues. Offense gained more important role than what previous coaches played the team. Same playing style continues for the next season, 2018-2019. Manner wants players to take on different roles, defenders were able to go in front of the net and forwards would take defenders places, aspiration is towards ongoing position less playing style. Manner wanted players to take more risks and play more aggressive hockey. (Kaleva 2018)

3.2 Sponsoring in Oulun Kärpät

Kärpät owns 73% of Qstock music festival. The music festival is held yearly in Oulu. Partnership between Oulun Kärpät and Qstock has continued long and according to Juha Junno, previous owner of Oulun Kärpät, this has been a part of Oulun Kärpät strategy. Kärpät has expanded its business outside ice hockey. Before purchasing majority of Qstock music festival, Kärpät invested in LED billboards all over Oulu and are selling ad to them. Thinking outside of the box will help the organization on not being too dependent on sponsors or success. This way Kärpät are securing the future of playing ice hockey. (Qstock 2017)

For the season 2018-2019 Kärpät added on-ice and rink side board dynamic digital screen which allow for different ads to be displayed during the same game. On-ice digital screens are first of their kind in the world. Being able to change the ad on ice will give teams the possibility to have more sponsors who wish to advertise on-ice. 2019-2020 season center ice LED on-ice screen was added to the center ice. This caused plenty of criticism because Oulun Kärpät is one of the most successful organizations in Liiga and it is not justified to add more sponsored ads. (Forum24 2018)

It is known that sponsor organizations wish to sponsor sport teams because they create healthy, active and vibrant image. As mentioned in chapter 2.6 tobacco firms were main sponsors of sports in 1980. In 2005, European Union Directive banned tobacco advertising because it attracted young viewers. In 2018-2019 Oulun Kärpät faced criticism because a company that sells snus products in Sweden, close to Finland borders in Haaparanta, called Nuuskakairan tukku, ad was seen in Oulun Energia Areena, game arena where Kärpät is playing. The ad itself is legal because it is advertising the company, not snus. The city of Oulu, who owns Oulun Energia Areena, wants to support healthy lifestyle, and snus has no part in it. Also, the image Oulun Kärpät is promoting is in contradiction with tobacco products. (Kaleva 2019) Nuuskakairan tukku is able to advertise itself in Oulun Energia Areena because the company is not located in Finland and Valvira, National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, has stated that they are unable to forbid co-operation between Oulun Kärpät and Nuuskakairan tukku. (YLE 2019) Before the start of season 2019-2020 it was mutually decided between Oulun Kärpät and the city of Oulu that Nuuskakairan tukku ads would be removed. (Kaleva 2019)

The team has also received plenty of criticism concerning their game jersey logos. Where in the National Hockey League has the control over how many logos are allowed to have on game jerseys and on-ice, Liiga is very different. In the season 2018-2019, Liiga had set a limit to 22 on-ice sponsor logos. There is a loophole in the limit because it concerns only "printed" ad. When Kärpät placed a digital screen that is able to show different ads, they are not breaking any rules. (Liiga 2018)

For the season 2019-2020 Kärpät released their third game jerseys first in Liiga history. Teams have one home jersey and one away jersey. For the season 2019-2020 Kärpät played with two home jerseys. The new jerseys are meant to be worn on every game played on Saturdays in regular season. (Kärpät 2019) Having a sponsor organizations logo on game jerseys is one way to make profit but should this way to fund ice hockey be left for minor leagues. Especially for an organization like Oulun Kärpät, who is funding themselves by selling advertisements to big billboard all over Northern Finland and getting profit from northern Finland's most popular music festival, Qstock. An idea was brought up amongst the ice hockey fans that because Kärpät is expanding its operations to other markets, outside of ice hockey, and making more profit now than ever it could lead to some much-needed changes. Making the game jerseys more appealing to fans by cutting off most of the logos. This could help Liiga to look more professional, the same way as the NHL where they only have a few sponsor logos shown.

Fans were surprised when Kärpät announced that they were bringing in third game jersey. This way Kärpät is able to have more sponsor shown and make better profit out of it. If there are organizations that are willing to pay for having their logo on show and if it is profitable to launch a third jersey, then why not. Of course, an organization like Kärpät seeks ways to maximize their profit but at the same time it is a sports team. Sports is business but when thinking about image,

the spirit of sports seems to disappear when the players and the ice is covered in logos. (Iltalehti 2017)

Kärpät could try to adapt and come up with new ideas on how to promote and give something concrete to their sponsors and leave the old-fashioned logos on jerseys for minor teams. Kärpät has faced plenty of criticism when it comes to sponsoring and creating ways to make more profit. They are pioneer when it comes to doing business and coming up with new, out of the box ideas on what a sports organization could do. No matter what, Liiga is going to change and the teams have to keep up with it. (YLE Areena 2018)

3.3 National Hockey League

The history of the National Hockey League (NHL) is long and complex. Unlike the history of the Finnish league (Liiga) which is simple to understand and realize why one thing lead to another and how Liiga that we know today came about, the NHL history is completely its own thing. In this research the history of the NHL is going to be discussed as simply and shortly as possible. The NHL was formed in 1917. Before the National Hockey League was founded, there was a league known as the National Hockey Association. (Historical Hockey Stats & Trivia VUOSI) The league went through multiple changes in game format, structure and regulations. In 1942 the game as we know it today came alive. Small changes were made here and there, one of the biggest changes were mandatory protective helmet wear in 1979 for those who entered the league. The last hockey player playing without a helmet was Craig MacTavish in the season 1996-1997. (NHL 2018)

The league expanded in 1942 when the "Original Six" teams joined the NHL. The Original Six teams are the Boston Bruins, Chicago Black Hawks, Detroit Red Wings, Montreal Canadiens, New York Rangers and the Toronto Maple Leaf's. The "Original Six" teams are still actively part of the league and five of the Original Six teams were ranked by Forbes in 2015 as the most valuable franchises in the NHL. 1967, six new teams were added to the league. 1970-1974 the total of teams in the NHL was 18. 1991-1992 the league had 26 franchises. By the year 2000 NHL had 30 teams and in season 2021-2022 there will be 32 teams playing in the NHL, 7 teams from Canada and 25 from the USA. (The Canadian Encyclopedia 2012)

Not every franchise is profitable in the NHL. Same problems are in the NHL as they are in Liiga, just in a much larger scale. The fact that there are teams that are not making annual profit in the NHL is not discussed. Often it is told who Liiga teams are failing and making loss every season, but it is forgotten to compare to other leagues in the world. Sports are rarely profitable business. (The Hockey News 2019)

ABOVE NHL AVERAGE	AVERAGE	BELOW NHL AVERAGE
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS	NEW YORK ISLANDERS	ST. LOUIS BLUES
MONTREAL CANADIENS	DALLAS STARS	NASHVILLE PREDATORS
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS	WASHINGTON CAPITALS	VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS
BOSTON BRUINS	CALGARY FLAMES	COLORADO AVALANCHE
LOS ANGELES KINGS	ANAHEIM DUCKS	SAN JOSE SHARKS
NEW YORK RANGERS	VANCOUVER CANUCKS	WINNIPEG JETS
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS	TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING	BUFFALO SABRES
	DETROIT RED WINGS	COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS
	MINNESOTA WILD	FLORIDA PANTHERS
	CAROLINA HURRICANES	NEW JERSEY DEVILS
	EDMONTON OILERS	ARIZONA COYOTES
	PHILADELPHIA FLYERS	
	OTTAWA SENATORS	

IMAGE 1. NHL team sponsorship rankings. (Sponsorship 2019)

The number of sponsors is considered as a key metric for top pro sports teams. Image 1 shows some statistics of which teams in the NHL are gaining plenty of profit from sponsoring. Seven teams in the NHL made operating loss in season 2018-2019. These teams are; Anaheim Ducks, New York Islanders, Winnipeg Jets, Nashville Predators, Columbus Blue Jackets, Arizona Coyotes and Florida Panthers. Most of these teams are also below NHL average when it comes to sponsorship rankings. (Statista 2020) Some connection can clearly be seen with the smaller number of sponsors and the real statistics of operating loss.

Most of North America's professional sport leagues are franchises. There is a specific number of teams, expanding a league takes long time and costs a lot of money. The current members of the NHL board of governors need to vote for a new expansion team to enter the league and in most cases a new state and a city is placed up for a bid by possible new owners. Newest expansion team in the NHL joining for season 2021-2022 in Seattle. The cost for the new franchise is \$650 million and the cost will be split among every already existing team in the league, except the Vegas Golden Knights due to a fact that they are the newest franchise, entering the league in 2017-2018. The member teams are corporate entities separate from the NHL, the teams will only operate under the NHL's auspices. Most of the teams playing in the NHL are expansion teams. NHL is divided into geographical divisions because of the travel distance in US and Canadian teams. Every franchise has a territorial right, so that they won't have any local rivals. This is going to change because the future Seattle team will only be three hours' drive from Vancouver, Canada, where one NHL franchise Vancouver Canucks are located. (The Hockey News 2019)

3.4 Sponsoring in the NHL

The sponsorship system, as we know it nowadays, started in the NHL 1978-1979. NHL franchises were allowed to sell ad space on their rink boards. First ad featured on NHL rink board was in 1980 in Minnesota North Stars game center. Eight pairs of ads were sold for \$3,000. Since then almost every inch of ad space allowed by the NHL has been sold to organizations and local businesses. NHL

has always had tight control over where and how many sponsored ads are allowed. (The hockey writers 2019)

For the season 2018-2019 the National Hockey League allowed four in-ice spots to add new camera visible areas to attract sponsors. This adds value for already existing sponsors and future sponsors. In-ice sponsors are the ones which support the franchises financially biggest and allowing the clubs to have four new logo spots in-ice, will bring more money to clubs. In-ice positions will give the organizations the biggest moments in the game because of the highlights shared across media's all over the world and at social media platforms. Statistics play major part in the game, it allowed the NHL to calculate the amount of time each in-ice logo position would be visible during a broadcast. These statistics can be presented at the negotiation when teams and organizations will meet. (Front office sports 2018)

32 NHL rinks out of 33 have arena sponsorships. These deals typically cost millions of dollars yearly. Duration of these arena sponsorships vary from few years to several decades. Scotiabank signed a 20-year arena sponsorship deal worth \$800 million in 2017 with Toronto Maple Leaf's. (The hockey writers 2019)

During the playoffs, NHL will sell sponsor privileges from two to four organizations. Those organizations will be at every playoff and Stanley Cup final games. The teams who are playing in the playoffs an in finals cannot sell the sponsor privileges themselves, the NHL is the one making the shots. The primary focus is to sell the Stanley Cup Playoffs to global organizations, because the NHL is broadcasted to more than 160 countries all over Europe, Australia and China. (Front office sports 2018)

Athletic apparel companies sponsor the NHL itself. The companies supply on-ice gear, game jerseys and undergarments for example. They will also be the official and licensed fan apparel supplier. The NHL has previously had a supplier contract with Reebok. The NHL made seven-year contract with Adidas in 2015 to be the league's new supplier. Every team playing in the NHL will have uniforms supplied by Adidas with their team logo sewed on. (Sponsorship 2018)

The day will come when sponsored ads are seen on NHL jerseys. It has happened in National Basketball Association, NBA. NBA teams are allowed to have small sponsored ads displayed on the front of their uniforms. All professional sports are business. No matter on what scale, NHL or Liiga, sponsors bring more revenues for the teams. (The hockey writers 2019)

NHL is allowing organizations to sponsor major ice hockey events. These yearly events include; Winter Classic, Stanley Cup Playoffs and Finals, Stadium Series, NHL All-Star Game and the NHL Draft. An organization can be a title sponsor, in Winter Classic where the event is "brought to you by" Bridgestone or be one of the main sponsors like in NHL All-Star Game. (Medium 2019) In 2015 Bridgestone signed a five-year contract with the NHL to be the title sponsor for Winter Classic. The event is now called Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic. (NHL 2015)

4 RESEARCH ON SPONSORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OULUN KÄRPÄT

This chapter contains the phases of the qualitative research on sponsoring opportunities for Oulun Kärpät. First, the interviewed organization, Kuopion KalPa, is introduced. Second, the research method used in this research is presented. Third, tools and methods for the interview are presented. Last, research principles used in this study are introduced.

4.1 Research methods used

The empiric material for this research was collected using **qualitative methods**. Other materials were collected from literature and electronic articles. Qualitative research comes from small amount of cases. (Qualres.org 2020) Qualitative research is often seen by just a case study method. There is a greater possibility for the research to commit more false conclusions than in quantitative research. (Ukdataservice.uk 2020) This for of study ables unique information which may bring new ideas and aspects. (Boeije 2010, 10)

Qualitative interview gives a possibility to the interviewees to expand their answers, speak more freely about their experiences and feelings. Qualitative interview finds answers to how and why, rather than how many or how much. This research method explores data on opinions, attitudes and feelings. (Ukdataservice.uk 2020)

In this research the interview was proceeded as structured interview. Questions were prepared beforehand and sent (3 January 2020) the first time and (9 March 2020) the second time to the interviewees via email. With structured interview there is not an opportunity to expand nor explore the topic. (Statisticssolutions.com 2020) Due to the difficulty of receiving answers from the interviewees, the best fitted interview method was structured interview. Structured interview gave a chance to make the questions as effortless for the interviewees as possible and more likely get answers from them. (Statisticssolutions.com 2020)

The interviews were chosen to be proceeded via email. A few emails in which face-to-face meeting was asked was send but there was no reply. Interview questions were sent by email to three different Finnish ice hockey organizations, the case company Oulun Kärpät and to receive more data and compare the answers to Tampereen Tappara and Kuopion KalPa. Answers to the interview questions were received from Oulun Kärpät and Kuopion KalPa.

The language used in the emails was Finnish, but the questions were also written in both Finnish and English. The same questions in the same order were send to both organizations. The questions were open, and interviewees were able to answer as broadly as they wanted. The answers were received in Finnish.

In addition to the case company Oulun Kärpät, one other company answered to the question about sponsoring in order to receive more data about improvement opportunities and current status of sponsorships in Liiga. The company was Kuopion KalPa. The questions were sent to Tampereen Tappara twice, but no answer was received.

Kuopion KalPa

Sortavalan Palloseura was founded in 1929 in Sortavala, a part of Karelia when it still belonged to Finland. Due to Continuation War Sortavalan Palloseura moved to Kuopio, eastern Finland, in 1945. In 1946 the name was changed to Kaleva Pallo, KalPa. 1980 was the first year when KalPa played in Liiga. 1990 KalPa finished second in Liiga, losing to Turun Palloseura (TPS). NHL players Sami Kapanen, Kalle Sahlstedt, Mika Strömberg, Kimmo Timonen, Artturi Lehkonen and Kasper Kapanen, to name a few, started their professional ice hockey careers in KalPa. The organization has steadily produced NHL players and the trend nowadays shows that a player can succeed as a professional player even though they come from smaller organizations. KalPa has won two silver medals (seasons 1990-1991 and 2016-2017) and one bronze medal in 2008-2009 while playing in Liiga. (Kalpa) For many years KalPa has given negative financial statement at the end of the season, this is why sponsors are important especially to organizations such as KalPa. (YLE 2019)

4.2 Tools and methods

Preparing the data, organizing the storage of different files so that they are easily retrieved when needed. A clear archive will prevent many hours of searching for something specific for the analysis. Documenting analyses that have been carried out are very important. (Boeije 2010, 72) Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts and other materials that a person accumulate to increase their own understanding of them and to enable a person to present what has been discovered to others. Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what a person will tell others. (Boeije 2010, 76)

Data is not mechanically separated and organized in predetermined categories. Sorting, naming and categorizing go hand in hand. Qualitative analysis is the segmenting of data into relevant categories and naming these categories. In the reassembling phase the categories are related to one another to generate theoretical understanding of the social phenomenon under study in terms of the research questions. (Boeije 2010, 76)

The interviews were done via email and the answers saved to iCloud so that analyzing and returning to the answers was so smooth as possible. A copy of both the questions and well as the answers were printed so that making notes and searching for patterns would be easy. In this research there were only two interviews with 10 questions, analyzing the data was relatively effortless and not time consuming. Printed versions were used more, due to a fact that it was easier to add notes, group

any similarities together and organize them more clearly. Having plenty of printed answers made analyzing process quite messy and not the most efficient way but it worked well for the situation.

The different interviews are compared with each other. The segmentation of data entails making distinctions between relevant fragments in the data. Fragments that the researcher believes should be put together. Reassembling of data is commonly described by a variety of terms, such as synthesizing, structuring, integrating, putting together, recombining and modelling. Reassembly requires continuous consideration of the data, the evolving relationships between the categories. (Boeije 2010, 79)

Constant comparison of the data is a key factor of analyzing qualitative research. It is important to discuss where differentiations took in place and where similarities were found. Constant comparison became a key factor when it was realized that a phenomenon will change itself when different circumstances occurred. Constantly comparing the data is when specific phenomenon can be found. (Boeije 2010, 83)

4.3 Research limitations and principles

The theme of the research was same for both organizations. Getting clear idea of how systematically sponsoring is executed in the organizations. General meaning and the present state of sponsors and their requirements and the abilities to improve sponsorships were studied. The research covers the viewpoint of sponsored organizations.

Due to time limits and the difficulties of receiving answers from sponsored party, the viewpoint of a sponsoring organization is not present in this research. There is an understanding that organizations tend to sponsor their local ice hockey teams whether or not they are successful. (YLE 2019) It would have been interesting to see if this rule applies to more successful teams as well.

The aim of the interview was to improve sponsor recruitment process and sponsorships, to find organizations that are willing to commit to the relationship long-term and to make a clear plan of what are the sponsors getting in return. Helping the organization to understand what they could do better when it comes to sponsoring. The questions in the interview were limited to consider sponsoring as a part of marketing strategy rather than just getting funds and make the teams think about their sponsoring recruitment process as a strategy.

The results and implementation of the research are evaluated by reliability and validity criteria. In qualitative research the researcher's own understanding constitutes the research results, in quantitative research the findings are drawn as the result of statistical calculations based on a set of data.

The **quality** of the research can be changed by creating a good frame work for the upcoming interview. It is important to think about how to deepen the themes in the interview and the quality

of the interview can be enhanced by ensuring that technical equipment work, and additional questions are presented. In this research there was not a possibility to present any additional questions because the interview was executed by email. Quality is linked with reliability and validity. (Boeije 2010, 168)

Reliability of a research can be increased by using the same data collection methods throughout the research process. Errors occur less frequently when all procedures are the same. Well prepared interview with clear questions can be considered as a reliable research. Problems that might arise in a survey research is that the interviewer misunderstands the given answers and there is not a change to ask follow-up questions. In these cases, the error is not systemic. (Boeije 2010, 169)

In this research the questions were kept as simple as possible in order to get truthful and relevant answers and trying to avoid errors that may occur when the interview is done by a survey. The interviewer carefully selected questions that were asked, prepared the questions in Finnish and in English in a case of a misunderstanding or the fact that there is a non-Finnish person giving the answers.

Validity is being specific about what was set out to assess in the research. It is dependent on the right measures used. Validity can be split into two categories; internal validity and external validity. Internal validity means the researchers have explained what they are going to find out in the research and it can be confirmed that that was the purpose of the research. When conclusions are correct in a way that they combine the relationship of concepts, the research is taken as internal validity. There are plenty of situations where something can negatively affect internal validity. External validity indicates whether the results of the research can be generalized into specific groups in the research context. If the research is external validity the results can be expected to apply to others as well. It is about minimizing and eliminating the threats of validity. (Boeije 2010, 180)

In this research the validity of the research has been considered by introducing the base of the research and the case company. The validity of the interviews was ensured by paying attention to the theme and preparation. Errors did occur because everyone did not want to participate, and the time frame became tight and there was no time left to interview other organizations.

4.4 Interviewees' viewpoints of sponsoring

In this chapter the results of the research are presented. The chapter is divided into several chapters by the research questions and aims of research. Sub-question in this research is meant by questions where the interviewer has referred often and are seen as important topics.

The first sub-question was: **Who is in charge of the sponsor recruitment or do the sponsors offer themselves?** It is clear that sponsoring is essential for the teams to manage financially but still there are not many teams that have people working only with sponsor recruitment, it is often a part of someone who is working with marketing.

Bigger organizations such as Oulun Kärpät, there are people that are only managing sponsorships. Every sales person has their own customers, sponsors, and every sales person is recruiting new sponsors. Each sales team member has their own sales arguments but the most important are responsibility, the importance and impact of junior ice hockey and the team's media presence. According to CEO of Oulun Kärpät, Tommi Virkkunen, Oulun Kärpät is the most popular team in Liiga when it comes to media attention.

Sponsoring brings crucial financial aid for the clubs. Making the sponsor recruitment as professional as possible, meaning that there are people who are dedicating their working hours only for sponsoring, could benefit the organization. Oulun Kärpät and Kuopion KalPa cannot be compared with each other due to a fact that, Kärpät has been playing in Liiga longer than KalPa, Oulu is twice as big in population than Kuopio, meaning there are more enterprises and young players in Oulu than in Kuopio. Also, Kärpät was the most successful team in the last decade and sponsors are more willing to commit to a team long-term. Still it is interesting to notice how different sponsoring is in these two teams. (Liiga 2017)

The second sub-question was: **How do you maintain long-term sponsorships?** According to the answer by Kärpät, the most of Oulun Kärpät sponsors are long-term sponsors. The exact median of how many years sponsorships last was not answered but Tommi Virkkunen mentioned that the change between sponsors are 10-20 percent each year. Meaning that there are still some sponsors who make one-year long contracts with Kärpät. Tommi Virkkunen CEO of Oulun Kärpät did mention that Kärpät have over 1000 business partners in their network. Oulun Kärpät throws yearly different events for their sponsors. By arranging events for business are mend to attract new business partners. This way Kärpät is able to eliminate the possibility that the significance of one sponsor is not too big. Details of what sort of events Kärpät is offering to its sponsors is unclear.

It is clear that sponsor organizations are waiting for something in return and sponsor relationships need to be maintained. Visibility is often valued as the main factor for sponsorship, but teams must offer something else as well to maintain long-term cooperation's. (Alaja 2001, 23) With long-term contracts the financial state of the sponsored party is secured and able the teams to make budgeting plans for longer period of time. (Valanko 2009, 92)

The third sub-question was: **How has the form of sponsoring changed during the last 10 years, for example social media becoming more common?** Responsibility has become a major trend in sponsoring. Organizations want to direct their sponsoring to generally positively seen companies, such as sport teams. This will give the sponsor organizations responsible image, they care for local teams and help junior athletes. Tommi Virkkunen of Kärpät mentioned that one of the most important argument when recruiting sponsors is supporting junior ice hockey.

Social media and how quickly media react nowadays creates challenges. Social media has added new opportunities but also created more challenges and extra work. Social media helps to bring

sponsors closer together with fans and interact with them through the sponsored organization. Oulun Kärpät is very active on Instagram and Facebook. Television broadcast contracts have become more meaningful, a lot of money is put into it. Statistical facts are presented before the game; top speed, likelihood of winning, fastest slap shot etc. The change of broadcasting the games has brought in more financial support for the teams.

Challenges in the recruitment process are to make sure that the right material is situated to the right place. Whether it is a player carrying a logo on a jersey, a player being the face of the sponsor organization, placing a sponsor logo on to the right spot or even sponsoring a particular game. These all affect the future of the cooperation. Statistics are often asked to be seen when recruiting sponsors. This can be negative because statistics are not always reliable nor can be implemented to every possible sponsorship. Noticeable has been that organization tend to sponsor fewer teams and clubs. They wish to create long-term relationships with fewer teams and be more meaningful to them.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discusses the thesis project as a whole. The challenges, successes and the outcome. First, development suggestions are presented. Second, the value of the research for Oulun Kärpät is evaluated. Third, self-evaluation is made in order to develop the learning process and to conclude what could have been done differently. Last, suggestions for further research in this field are presented.

5.1 Development suggestions

In the interview, development suggestions did not come up. Neither of the interviewed parties mentioned any development ideas. This chapter discusses the development possibilities Oulun Kärpät could adapt and how they could transform the way sponsoring is seen in Finland.

Even though visibility, having sponsor organizations logos on show, is one of the main factors of sponsoring, it should not be the first thing ice hockey teams offer. Teams must listen what sponsors are looking for, they might not even need visibility. (Valanko 2009, 206) In the interview Tommi Virkkunen of Kärpät mentioned visibility being one of their biggest assets when recruiting sponsors. However, Kärpät should think about other significant assets to gain new long-term sponsorships for organizations who may not want the visibility.

Oulun Kärpät is one of the leaders with Tampereen Tappara, who did not want to participate in this survey and Helsingin IFK who was not interviewed, when it comes to sponsoring. Every year they come up with new ideas on how to expand sponsoring and how to get as much financial support as possible. Kärpät has proof what they are able to show to sponsors and convince them to support the organization financially. The meaning of junior athletes is massive, having the right kind of program to help young athletes to become the next NHL stars is not cheap. Liiga is not on the top three European ice hockey leagues and to get Liiga back to be the top ice hockey league in Europe means a lot has to change and Kärpät can be a big part of it.

Creating different levels of sponsorships plans and packages which would be available before the season starts and where sponsors could choose the package they fell is the most suitable for them. These packages would all be long-term, from four years to ten years. This way short term sponsorship contracts would be eliminated. Liiga is trying to become more professional and highly considered and this could be one way to reform the way sponsorships are done in Finland. The sponsorship packages would be evaluated yearly, changes could be done but the fact that sponsorships are co-operations where both parties receive something in return would be assured. Minimizing the number of main sponsors, which Tommi Virkkunen of Kärpät mentioned that was something they were not willing to do because the significance of one sponsor would be too great. For the Liiga to transform itself is something that needs to happen. By having, for example, five main sponsors whose logos would be on-ice and on game jerseys would bring a new level of professionalism to the league. Especially when Oulun Kärpät has been criticized by the media for

having many logos on game jerseys and placing digital on-ice screens, where the logos of sponsors will change. It brings to mind minor league ice hockey where every empty space is filled with logos. By eliminating the amount of sponsor logos shown would bring clear, simple and fresh look. Minimizing the number of logos on-ice and in game jerseys could be replaced with specific player deals. The sponsor could pick a player from the team they wish to carry the sponsor logo on their game jersey. The sponsor organization would also be able to use the player which is carrying their logo in their own ads.

Liiga could come up with events such as yearly Winter Classic where they would be able to sell title sponsorships. This would bring excitement to ice hockey fans in Finland when specific events, like Winter Classic would be held. Liiga would be getting more revenue when they would sell title sponsorship. Teams participating in event similar to Winter Classic would be wearing jerseys without sponsor ads, only the title sponsor of the event would be seen. In 2017 Helsinki Ice Challenge was held where 16000 fans participated to watch the outdoor game between Oulun Kärpät and Helsingin IFK. Liiga could make this kind of event yearly and benefit from it financially. (Jatkoaika 2017)

Creating events for sponsor organizations such as once a week ice hockey practice with the players themselves. Sponsor organizations workers would be able to sign up their children who are interested in or are already playing ice hockey could participate to this once in a life time chance to spend time with their idols. It is easier to create deeper co-operation with the already existing partners than create new ones and these personal events could be one way to do it.

Suggestion ideas for KalPa is mentioned briefly. The absence of sales pitch when it comes to recruiting sponsors is missing. In some cases, the sponsors offer themselves. There is no argument on why someone should sponsor Kuopion KalPa. It is based on the fact that an organization is wanting and willing to support them financially. Perhaps it would be more effective if everyone who is recruiting sponsors had statistical fact on hand and they could sell themselves better. The absence of sponsors receiving any benefits in return seemed to be missing. The question was not answered. Coming up with events for just sponsors could be a great way to start. Perhaps taking in business student interns from Savonia University of Applied Sciences or University of Eastern Finland to come up with new, fresh ideas on what they could do with sponsors.

5.2 Value for the case company and evaluation

The need for the research was not large. It could have been more relevant if the case company chosen would have been one of the newest members of Liiga. Finnish ice hockey, especially men's professional ice hockey has been studied widely but the sponsoring part has not been so significant in these studies. This is one of the reasons why the topic was chosen. This thesis assists to find new ways Oulun Kärpät could do sponsoring, and as well other larger and successful teams in Liiga, and help lifting Liiga back to top ice hockey leagues in Europe. This research can offer new viewpoints to Oulun Kärpät.

The theory base includes wide and useful information about sponsorships from the viewpoint of both parties, sponsors and the sponsored organizations. The history of Finnish ice hockey league and Oulun Kärpät is included as well as the NHL where examples of how Liiga could implement new ways to do sponsoring. The aim of this theses was to offer interesting and fresh ideas on how sponsoring could evolve for better in Finland. The number of interviews was small, and the absence of sponsor organizations interviews made it challenging to make national generalizations based on those two interviews. This can be perceived as criticism towards the research. By changing only sponsoring, Liiga cannot become one of the top ice hockey leagues in Europe. It is only one possible way to help Liiga and teams as well. Presenting these ideas could be beneficial to other teams.

Reliability and validity of the research could have been improved. The small number of interviewees affected on the reliability of this research. One question in the survey sent to the interviewees cover the topic of how the teams could improve their own sponsor management. Neither of the interviewed organizations answered the question. The research question how to improve sponsor management in a Finnish men's ice hockey teams was not answered. Conclusions on how to improve sponsor management can be made using the answers from the survey's other questions but straight answer to the research questions was not made.

The implementation of the research did not progress as planned. The difficulty of receiving answers form interviewees made the process of this thesis long. The plans of the deadline of the research changed notably in the early state of the research.

One of the issues in qualitative research is the planning and implementing of the interviews. By contacting both of the parties right in the early state and adding more accurate additional questions to the interview would have brought a lot more depth to the research. Interviews could be improved by having face to face interviews, not only survey send via email. This would have surely given more information and better development suggestions could have made.

5.3 Self-evaluation and learning process

The research began by searching and exploring sponsoring. The different stages of sponsoring, its history and how it has evolved in Finland and in other countries. The problems sponsoring has brought, and the challenges is facing in the future. The research questions were selected to gain more information about the sponsoring in these particular organizations and how much do they differ from each other. Getting information that is not available online, only the experts are able to answer. The different stages in the research made learning diverse and interesting.

The challenges and opportunities of sponsoring have become clearer. How something that is seen as a positive opportunity can create massive challenges at the same time. In Finland sponsoring is still new and is not taken as seriously and professionally as it should. This research gave an opportunity to study the challenges teams are facing more profoundly as during other studies.

Completing the research has been a path with plenty of obstacles on the way. The whole research has been completely unknown. It was easy to choose the topic of the thesis but choosing the right methods for interviews and analyzing the data felt challenging. Motivation was also a big challenge during this research.

As many times mentioned before the challenge of gathering answers from the interviews affected a lot this research. Because of the hectic schedule of ice hockey teams, especially in spring time caused plenty of stress and made this research project last long. The interviews included feelings of success but also arose a lot of new questions. Because the interviews were made by survey, it was not possible to ask any additional questions. This led to hunger to arrange face to face interviews for next research. More experienced interviewer would most likely have gotten more relevant information.

Transcribing the interviews was the least time-consuming part in the research. The analyzing phase was the most time consuming. Finding good source to back up the analyzing phase was challenging.

There were times in this research where language used caused problems. The interviews questions were originally written in English and because they were sent to Finnish people, they had to be translated to Finnish. The challenges in arranging sentences so that they would be as professional as possible felt difficult. When using Finnish sources and translating them to English was time consuming and not pleasant.

All in all, the research process has taught plenty. Realizing that obstacle may occur in every step and being prepared for them will help a lot when doing next research. An important milestone was reached when first answers to the interviews was received.

5.4 Further research suggestions

This study was planned to answer the specific needs of one single organization, Oulun Kärpät. Kuopion KalPa was used in this research to give another viewpoint. It would be interesting if a research would be done solemnly about KalPa or another smaller team in Liiga. The number of interviews was small. In further research, wider, for example, where every Liiga team would be presented would receive more comprehensive and better understanding of sponsoring in Liiga teams and who to change it.

Another interesting viewpoint would be only interviewing sponsor organizations and what would be an ideal world to them when it comes to sponsoring.

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