A Comparison Between Sport Sponsorships in Finland and Sweden

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Abstract:

The competition for sponsors is getting harder all the time, and with significant differences between sport sponsoring in Finland and in Sweden, one might ask why the differences are as big as they are. There are a lot of factors that can influence the decision to sponsor; the country’s economic situation, a lack of resources, lack of knowledge on how to utilize sponsorships most effectively (Viinikka 2014) or undervaluing the worth of sponsorships (Jalonen & Haltia 2015). At times when the amount of sponsorship investments is higher than ever before, and the challenges for sport properties to stay afloat are even greater, the importance of being able to successfully manage sponsorships is ever more significant.

The aim of this thesis is to explore what lessons there are to be learned regarding sponsorship management by comparing Finnish and Swedish ice hockey sponsorships. An understanding for how ice hockey teams could improve their relationships to sponsors, as well as an understanding for the attitudes towards sponsoring among existing sponsors, were sought after. In order to fulfill the aim of this thesis, a qualitative research in the form of personal interviews were conducted with two ice hockey teams from Finland and two ice hockey teams from Sweden, as well as with five sponsors from each country. The results indicate that Finnish teams could benefit from building stronger relationships to the sponsors, as well as be innovative, customize contracts, distinguish themselves from others, conduct customer surveys and offer companies an opportunity to be either corporate social responsibility-focused or return on investment-focused depending on the goals and objectives of the sponsor.

Keywords: sport marketing, sport sponsorship, sponsorship management, sponsorship relationships
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1 INTRODUCTION

“Sports is not just a game. It’s big business.” (Ukman 2014). The sports industry, just as any other industry, is focused on offering their customers what they need and want, and hopefully, satisfy the customers on an increasingly competitive market. Not only is there a competition among all the different sports, but the sports also need to compete with every other actor within the entertainment business. The sports industry has grown significantly during the last decades, and while it keeps growing, the sports industry is considered to be one of society’s most important and widespread institutions. (Shank 2009:4-7)

Simultaneously as the sports industry has grown and become increasingly important, sports sponsoring has become an extremely popular marketing tactic, which helps businesses show their commitment to the community (Hammarskjöld 2012). Sports need to rely evermore on sponsorships and this is additionally seen in all sport venues where more space is being set up for sponsors, all because of the need, and want, to get more sponsors (Van Riper 2013). Companies can use sponsoring as a way to reach their target group by associating with a certain sport property that is relevant, and important, to the customer (Amis & Cornwell 2005:147). Sponsoring is one of the most used advertising channels, and businesses are realizing the power sponsoring has. As a marketing communication tool, sponsoring is considered to be highly cost effective, and should be considered as a long-term investment. (Thjømoe, Olson & Arntsen 2012)

Sport sponsorships have grown into the most popular kind of sponsorship. In Europe, the ratio between sport and non-sport sponsorships is approximately 65:35, however, globally, almost 90 % of the total amount spent on sponsorships goes into sports. (O’Keefee 2014) Sponsorships have dramatically escalated during the last decades, with sponsorship investments reaching about 3 billion euros worldwide in 1984, in 2002 the number was estimated to have reached 20 billion euros (Lagae 2005: 36). By 2014, the number was predicted to hit about 48.735 billion euros globally (converted from USD according to the exchange rate on February 1, 2015, XE Currency Converter 2015) (O’Keefee 2014). The fact is, no sport property, whether it is a professional or junior team or an individual athlete, would be able to survive without the monetary resources offered by sponsors (Bühler & Nufer 2010:93; Sims 2011:9).

With the monetary help from sponsors, sport properties have a greater opportunity to offer their attendees an even better event and experience (Securing Sponsorships 2005).
Sponsorship agreements bring sport leagues, teams and individual athletes a sense of certainty as they usually are multi-year deals (Van Riper 2013). All sport properties rely on sponsorships, advertising fees and game attendees to survive, and with the support of these channels, they are capable of generating most of their revenue (Jozsa 2009:169). Sport properties are evermore pressured to build and maintain relationships with their customers, whether it is the individual fan or the sponsoring company, in order to remain successful (Tsiotsou 2013). Sponsoring can furthermore help both the sport property as well as the sponsoring company to build the desired relationships (Hammarskjöld 2012). Nonetheless, for sponsors, as well as for sport properties, it is however not enough to do what they used to anymore, and standing out from competitors has become a necessity if one wishes to become successful (Belzer 2013).

Since ice hockey is the most watched and followed sport in Finland, and has been for several years (Sponsor Navigator tutkimus 2014), it creates a great opportunity for businesses to improve their visibility as well as consumers’ awareness of the business. Ice hockey could be considered to be one of the most advantageous sports to sponsor in Finland. As 20 % of all the sport sponsorships invested in Finland goes into ice hockey, while the rest of the sponsorship investments are shared among all the other sports and events (Viinikka 2014), ice hockey is the sport in Finland to receive the most money form sponsors. The sponsoring of ice hockey is therefore interesting to study, and will so act as the type of sport sponsorship to be studied in this thesis.

1.1 Research problem

Sports teams are today met by even greater challenges when working to attract and maintain sponsors (Lee & Ross 2012), and it is therefore an important subject to study as sport properties need to learn how to best attract and maintain the necessary sponsors. When it comes to sport sponsoring, Finland is far behind its neighboring country Sweden (Viinikka 2014). The difference in sponsoring between Finland and Sweden are significant, and while sponsorships in Sweden in 2012 reached a total of 1 140 million euros, the corresponding number in Finland was only 166 million euros (Sponsoroinnin nykytila Suomessa 2013). In Finland, out of the 166 million euros that were invested into sponsorships, 55 % went into sport sponsoring, in Sweden, 72 % of their 1 140 million euros were invested into sports (Jääskeläinen 2014). In the same year, Swedish companies invested 500 million euros into sport sponsorships, while Finnish companies only invested 91.3 million euros. The numbers in Finland however, seems to be decreasing
rather than increasing as they seem to be doing in Sweden. In Finland, about 20% of sport sponsorships are invested into ice hockey. (Viinikka 2014) Furthermore, about 9.1% of all the money put on different marketing and advertising activities in Sweden was in 2012 invested into sponsorships, only about half of that, with a percentage of 5.0, was invested into sponsorships in Finland (Tilastot 2014).

There is a lot of so called sponsorship potential in Finland, the problem though seems to be that nobody knows how to utilize it. The challenges in Finland might be the economic situation, investments are critically considered and the human resources available in companies to handle sponsorships are lacking. (Viinikka 2014) One of the problems in Finland also seem to be that sponsorship contracts are signed for cheap, and companies’ are not paying well enough for their received rights and benefits. Furthermore, companies in Finland are considered to go easy on sponsorships as they are considered to require a lot of time and effort to handle properly, while in Sweden several companies have separate sponsorship divisions that handle these issues. (Jääskeläinen 2014) Companies in Finland do not quite understand the value sponsoring can have for them, and the understanding of sponsorships are therefore quite narrow. Sponsoring is a marketing resource that Finnish companies do not seem to be able to fully understand the importance of, and is considered to be rather untapped. Sport sponsoring could be used as a way to more effectively get one’s own brand known to the public. Finnish companies could moreover also use sport sponsoring in order to create positive images of the brand among their customers. (Jalonen & Haltia 2015) As ice hockey is a sport that is highly popular in both Finland and Sweden, sponsoring the sport would assumedly give companies in both countries the same benefits if utilized in the same way. The most interesting question in this paper is therefore what the differences between Finland and Sweden are, when it comes to the attracting, securing and maintaining of sponsors as well the managing of the relationships, and how these differences affect sponsorship investments.

It is worth considering that the sponsor object has a growing amount of competitors with whom they need to compete to get sponsors (Calzada 2013:124), making the job to attract and secure sponsors even harder. Not only does for example an ice hockey team need to compete with other ice hockey teams, but also other local and national teams and athletes, sport leagues, occasional events (for example, the ice hockey world championships) as well as the individual players on the team itself. All these different groups are looking for sponsors, and are hence competing for the same businesses to support them. The
supply of sponsorships is moreover usually less than the demand (Lagae 2005:54) and will further aggravate the process of securing sponsors.

Relationships are important when attracting and serving sponsors, and the teams need to build and take care of their relationships with sponsors in order to establish long-term relationships (Bühler & Nufer 2010:89). Recognizing strong relationships, and the importance and power they have, is key on today’s highly competitive market (Hougaard & Bjerre 2009:15), and it is said that the most successful sport sponsorship has its foundation in a good relationship between the two parties concerned (Nufer & Bühler 2010). There has moreover been little research done on the subject of relationships within sports marketing, and while a few studies have been done, most literature ignore the topic of relationship marketing within sports, or only briefly discusses the issue (Bühler & Nufer 2010:3). Ice hockey teams in the higher divisions often have a lot of different sponsors, some of them investing a large amount of money, and hence building strong relationships to these sponsors are essential for the future success of the team and the continued cooperation between the parties. It is therefore an important problem to study, to find out the importance of relationships between the sponsor and the sport property and how to most successfully build strong and long-term relationships.

Sponsoring can be studied from both the sport properties’ as well as the businesses’ perspective (the marketing of sports versus the marketing through sports) (Lagae 2005:11-12). Sport properties need to consider sponsoring and make it an important part of their marketing strategy, as they need sponsors mostly for their monetary resources. A lot of money is involved in ice hockey and a lot of the team’s revenue is going into the salaries of the team’s players. Without the monetary help from the sponsors, the teams are not able to attract and secure the most skilled, and expensive, players. In order to succeed, the teams hence need to successfully be able to manage sponsorships so that they also can build a strong and competitive team. Extant research is however mostly focused on the sponsors’ perspective, considering the importance of sponsorships for the sponsor, and how sponsoring can meet their objectives as well as improve their advertising, and in a lesser extent does literature focus on how to get, and keep, sponsors seen from the sport property’s perspective. So, just as there is limited literature on the topic of relationship marketing within sports, there is an overall lack of literature to help marketers on the topic of selling sponsorships (Sims 2011:14). There is therefore a lack of a strong theoretical foundation when it comes to sponsorships from the sport property’s perspective. The problem is hence not only practical but also theoretical.
1.2 The aim of the study

The aim of this study is to explore what lessons there are to be learned regarding sponsorship management by comparing Finnish and Swedish ice hockey sponsorships. The thesis will furthermore study how ice hockey teams could improve and build their relationships to sponsors, in addition to examining the attitudes towards sponsoring among the existing sponsors. By comparing two male ice hockey teams in Finland (Vaasan Sport and Ässät) to two male ice hockey teams in Sweden (MODO Hockey and Brynäs IF), as well as a couple of their sponsors, the goal is to draw conclusions on which the differences are, and therefore help teams in Finland improve their marketing towards present, and possible future, sponsors. The thesis aims to answer the following research questions in order to explore what the differences between Finland and Sweden are when it comes to managing ice hockey sponsorships:

- How are relationships between the team and the sponsors built and maintained and how do these affect the sponsorship?
- What are the attitudes of the sponsors, and how do these affect their willingness to buy sponsorships?

The thesis is written on the request of Vaasan Sport, as a possibility for them to improve their understanding and development of sponsorships. The results of this study will therefore be helpful for them, as well as other sports teams in Finland and elsewhere, as they can gain a deeper understanding of the successful management of sponsorships.

1.3 Delimitations

In order to increase the comparability of the study, only teams that are located in cities approximately the same size as Vaasa (regarding the number of inhabitants) will be included. As the population of Vaasa is about 66 000 (Information om Vasa 2014), all teams will be located in cities with a population of less than 100 000. Due to the same reason, only teams playing in the highest divisions of ice hockey in respective country, the Finnish Liiga as well as the Swedish Hockey League (SHL), will be included in the empirical study. The study will further be delimited to include sponsors of the participating teams only.

In order to narrow the study down, only the marketing of sports from the sport property’s perspective will be considered, and hence not the businesses’ marketing through sport with the help of sponsorships, though benefits of this will be considered and presented
in a certain amount as it might lead to answers on how sport properties successfully can target, and attract businesses. The study will further be delimited to the teams’ process of managing sponsorships (the attracting, securing and maintaining of sponsors) and the building of relationships, and will therefore not consider the termination of sponsorships. The theoretical framework will be delimited to include the management of sponsorships from the sport property’s perspective, as well as sponsorship relationships as a part of the management of sponsorships as these are the most relevant topics for the aim of the study.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This paper is begun with an introduction to the topic and a presentation of the research problem. The aim of the study is thereafter presented, followed by the delimitations of the paper and then by the structure of this thesis. Chapter 2 will present the theoretical framework relevant to the topic in order to best suit the aim of the study. Chapter 2 will shortly present and define sports marketing before going deeper into sport sponsorships. Sport sponsorships will be defined and theories concerning the management of sponsorships will thereafter be presented. The chapter will also include an overview of how to best build relationships to the sponsors in order to maintain them successfully.

The third chapter will present the methodology of the paper, discussing the research method used in the empirical study, the sampling strategy that was done in order to choose the informants as well as a discussion of the collection of data and the designing of the interview-guides. Chapter 4 will present the results of the study as well as an analysis of the findings. The results are divided according to country, first presenting the results of the Finnish teams followed by the Swedish ones. Following the results of the teams, the results from the interviews with the Finnish sponsors will be presented. The answers gained from the Swedish sponsors will follow thereafter. The analysis will, due to different perspectives of the topic, be divided into two parts; the comparison and analysis of the teams followed by a comparison and an analysis of the sponsors. The chapter will be concluded with a summary of implications and inferences as well as a discussion of the credibility of the thesis (including the reliability, the validity and the generalization of the study). The fifth and final chapter will conclude the content of this paper. Following the last chapter a Swedish summary of the thesis will be presented.
2 THE MANAGEMENT OF SPONSORSHIPS

This chapter will shortly define sports marketing before going more specifically into sport sponsorships. The sport sponsorship section will shortly define and present sport sponsorships from a rather general point of view before going into the attracting, securing and maintaining of sponsors. These three can combined be considered as the management of sponsorships. The attracting of sponsors will present how sport properties could approach companies and how they could raise companies’ interest in the property. The part on attracting sponsors will further present reasons for sponsoring, as well as how sport properties could offer good sponsoring opportunities to companies. The securing of sponsors will on the other hand present the process of getting the company to actually become a sponsor of the sport property. A short sub-chapter on personal selling will also be presented in conjunction with the part on securing sponsors, in order to get a better understanding of the process of successfully selling a product or service, in this case sponsorships. The maintaining of sponsors will include the building of relationships in order for the sponsors to remain partners to the property, as well as other factors that can influence a company’s reasons to remain as a sponsor. The chapter will be concluded with a summary of the theoretical framework, including figures presenting the key issues presented in the chapter.

2.1 A definition of sports marketing

Sports marketing can be defined in multiple different ways. One definition is that sports marketing is the way companies identify themselves with one, or multiple, sports teams or athletes, their success and skills, and by that, differentiate themselves from other companies (Schlossberg 1996:1). However, sports marketing can be divided into different point of views, two of them being marketing of sports and marketing through sports. A sports team or a sports club would engage in the marketing of sports, while a company would employ marketing through sports. (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton 2000:8-9; Blakey 2011:3; Lagae 2005:11-12) Sports marketing develops and takes advantage of a sport property's assets in order to create revenue that is profitable, sustainable over time as well as concrete and measurable. Marketers in sports mostly engage in marketing activities targeted at companies, B2B-marketing, and through successful business-to-business relationships, comes positive word-of-mouth that enhances the possibilities for new and improved relationships. (Calzada 2013:17, 20)
2.2 Sport sponsorships

Businesses that decide to sponsor a team or an athlete are just as important as all other consumers to the sport property, however, in contrast to individual consumers who exchange money for the offered product, businesses aim to exchange money or other resources for association with the sponsored event or sport (Shank 2009:15; Lagae 2005:35). Sponsorship can therefore be defined as

Investment in an event, organisation, exhibition, etc. in order to raise awareness, increase an organisation’s profile or generate positive links between the sponsor and the event itself and thereby gain a positive image for the sponsor and its products or services. (Eagle, Dahl, Hill, Bird, Spotswood & Tapp 2000:338)

As sport events are widely covered by the media, sport sponsorships are considered being the economically most significant kind of sponsorship and by supporting and promoting one or several athletes, teams or sport events, businesses engage in the marketing activity (Homburg, Kuester & Krohmer 2009:276). By being widely covered by the media and as the media brings the sports to the consumers, it is very beneficial for businesses to sponsor a team or an athlete as they can get increased visibility, especially in the media (Schlossberg 1996:xii). According to Nufer (2013:10), sports that are popular among the population, and consequently widely covered by the media, have an advantage over less popular sports that do not have as strong of a media presence, as sponsors often turn to the more popular sports. By sponsoring a sport property, businesses get a huge possibility to promote their own values through the effective channel that sports has to offer with their fan-base, attention-grabbing athletes and their media-coverage (Ukman 2014).

However, just as sports teams need to struggle and fight for attention and coverage in the media against all their competitors, both within their own sport as well as other sports, (Nicholson 2007:11) they also need to compete against all these competitors for sponsors.

In order to create a successful partnership, both the sponsor and the sport property need to be able to gain something from the partnership, it needs to meet the organizational objectives and goals of both parties (Wakefield 2007). It can however be hard to determine and measure the beneficial outcomes of a sponsorship as sponsorships are considered being intangible (Eagle et al. 2000:308), and the decision process, in which a company decides whether to sponsor a league, a team, or an individual athlete, can be very complex. Even though there are difficulties in deciding on sponsorships, the marketing activity has become even more popular as the decision to sponsor can help businesses achieve several different organizational objectives. (Shank 2009:15)
A sport property’s objectives for a sponsorship include promotion of the property’s image through a reliable relationship, an increased awareness of the property as well as of a specific sport product or service. The objectives further include an increase in reliability among consumers (through the sponsor), a chance to position or re-position the sport brand, a possibility to obtain necessary funding and resources, an increase in the satisfaction of staff, and promotion of reliability with stakeholders. (Blakey 2011:114) The sports property should however, besides knowing and understanding their own goals and objectives, understand what factors might drive a business to sponsor a certain property (Calzada 2013:223). According to Blakey (2011:114) these sponsor objectives may include the promotion of the company’s image, a formation of an overall perception of the brand, an increased degree of awareness of the product, service and brand, a push in sales and a possibility to achieve a competitive advantage over its competitors. The company’s objectives may further include a chance to improve staff morale, relations as well as satisfaction, and the promotion of shareholders’ satisfaction. Both parties further want to create an ‘image transfer’ by associating with the other. (Blakey 2011:114) If the business reaches the goals and objectives that they have placed on the sponsorship, they will likely speak positively of the sport property to other companies, and hopefully, future sponsors (Calzada 2013:20).

Sponsors need to be able to make their brand become a literal part of the sport property they are sponsoring, this, by creating dynamic and pleasing campaigns. It is furthermore essential that the sponsor and the sport property stands for similar values and corresponding messages in order for the sponsorship to succeed. (Belzer 2013) Most importantly, it is essential that the sport property and the sponsor work together, in order to create the most successful sponsorship, as well as the best possible return on investment (Calzada 2013:223). Furthermore, in order to be successful with the sport event itself, the individual consumers and the sponsors must form a relationship together with the sport property, in which they all are interdependent (Shank 2009:25).

2.2.1 Attracting sponsors

In order for the sport property to find potential sponsors, and in order for them to give the sport property any attention, the sport property needs to look at sponsorships from the sponsor’s perspective. The sport property needs to consider what benefits they want to offer the sponsors, they need to consider why the sponsor would like to become a part of the property and the event, as well as how the sponsor can come to a conclusion on
their return on investment. (Securing Sponsorships 2005) According to Calzada (2013:169) the best possible sponsorship candidate has business in your geographical area, the decision-maker of sponsorships is a fan of the team and the fit, between the company’s and the sport property’s values and positioning, is close. In addition, the ideal candidate has experience from past sponsorships, is about to introduce a new product or service and therefore has a larger budget, and finally, the candidate has recently lost a sponsorship against its wishes, and has therefore extra resources available, resources that would have been spent on another sport property. (Calzada 2013:169)

At the beginning of the process to attract sponsors, it is important for the sport property to spend time to identify their most suitable prospects among all the different possibilities, in order to maximize their chance of selling sponsorships. To find the best possible prospects, the sport property should reach out to companies or organizations that are already in some way familiar to sponsoring different properties and events. Another idea is to reach out to companies that have shown a certain interest in reaching out to the people that attends the sport property’s events, for example through previous sponsorships of similar character. A third idea is to reach out to the competitors of a certain business, if the competitor is sponsoring a similar event or property. The chance is that the business would like to be visible in the same kind of contexts as its competitors, in order for them to reach the same group of consumers and eliminate the advantage the competitors have by sponsoring a certain event. (Securing Sponsorships 2005)

According to Hollander (cited by Gumpel 2010) there are nine steps to follow in order to attract sponsors. These nine steps are cited in Table 1.

<table>
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<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Nine steps to attract sponsors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>“Be clear about your demographic and your platform”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>“Have a great sponsor proposal”</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>“Promise deliverables”</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>“Don’t sell yourself short”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>“Find the right person to approach in the company”</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>“Be impeccable with your word”</td>
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It is important that you know who your customers are and what they do. If the sport property knows who their customers are, it is easier to attract sponsors by giving them an opportunity to reach their desirable customers through the sport property. The property further needs to be able to promise deliverables by being specific of what the sponsor will get, not only should they be told that they will be covered in the media, but which specific media they will be covered in. The sport property cannot be afraid to ask for a higher investment, sometimes smaller investments make no sense as they take more time to decide upon than what they invest. The best way to contact the company is to reach out to the marketing department, and if such a department does not exist, one should reach out to the head of the company. Importantly, the property should call rather than send e-mails as e-mails are easily avoided and unanswered. Furthermore, in order to attract sponsors, the sport marketer needs to be on time, keep promises that are made, be honest and show integrity. One only has one opportunity to give a great first impression. The sport property always needs to follow up, as well as be short and ask for what one wants. However, one should not take up more time than necessary, as everybody is busy. (Gumpel 2010)

As a sponsorship should benefit both the sponsor and the one being sponsored, and as it should involve mutual interest, a sponsorship should preferably be referred to as a partnership rather than a sponsorship (Eagle et al. 2000:279). One of the most important factors in order to establish long-term relationships with the sponsor, is to find businesses that has a better fit to the sport property, as a better fit between the two parties will likely mean a more stable and long-term development of the partnership created (Nufer 2013:16). A league, a sports team or an individual athlete must hence market themselves as the best sponsorship opportunity available. The sport property needs to appeal to businesses that consider the sponsoring of the specific team, athlete or event in order to meet their organizational objectives. (Shank 2009:329)
Possible sponsors look at different factors of the sponsorship proposal in order to decide whether they will sponsor or not. These factors include: “fan attendance and demographic profile of fans at the event, cost or cost per number of people reached, length of contract, media coverage, value-added promotions and sponsorship benefits”. (Shank 2009:348) In order for a business to successfully sign a sponsorship agreement they, among other things, need to consider if they would like to increase the awareness and knowledge of the company, if they want to increase their visibility in the media, if they want to involve the company in the society or the community, or if they would like to alter the perception consumers have of the business (Eagle et al. 2000:265). Teams hence need to be able to offer such opportunities to possible sponsors.

To be able to attract sponsors, the sport objects that want to be sponsored will need to be able to offer their possible sponsors a few things in order to most successfully appeal to them. Sponsoring gives businesses, according to customers, an opportunity to advertise for less money and for more subtle advertising than traditionally, an improved image among the customers due to association with the sport, as well as an opportunity for high profile marketing. (Meenaghan 1995:163) Potential sponsors look for an opportunity to be able to associate with a successful team or athlete, and with a sold-out stadium or arena (which will more likely also affect the team’s performance positively), sponsors will reach a greater amount of possible customers with their advertising (Calzada 2013:85). Sport properties can further consider offering their sponsors various interactions with the attendees and fans, visibility on the sport property’s website for the sponsor to reach a broader audience, and VIP treatment and possibilities, in order to make the sponsorship even more attractive (Securing Sponsorships 2005).

Sport teams also need to reconsider their advertising spaces, and consider ways to increase the available and offered spaces they currently have. As an example, Toyota sponsors FIFA, and at an occasion Messi was rewarded ‘Man of the Match’ during the Club World Cup 2011 final and received a car from Toyota. Conveniently, the car was shown during the awarding on TV, and it was thus an effective way to create new advertising space by the marketers. This however, requires constant observations, creativity and collaboration with sponsors. (Calzada 2013:140-141) Another option to increase advertising space for the sport property is to sell the naming right of the stadium where the sport property holds its practices and games. This option should however be carefully considered as it might upset fans and cause negative reactions among the public. One such example is the San Francisco “49ers’ (NFL) which sold the naming rights of their home
stadium, and so the name changed from “Candlestick Park” to “3Com Park” and later when the rights were re-sold, to “Monster Park”. This truly upset the people of San Francisco and they kept referring to the stadium by its original name, and later voted for the facility to be renamed to its former name. However, today a lot of professional sports teams have their facilities named after a company. (Woisetschläger, Haselhoff & Backhaus 2014) An example of a facility in Finland that is named after a company is the best known Hartwall Arena.

For sport properties to be able to attract new, and retain old, sponsors, they need to offer sponsorship packages that are centered on digital and social media elements. Furthermore, the sport property must also be able to offer a customized and unique digital and social media presence that identifies both with the sport property’s own customers (the fans), but also with the sponsors’ target groups. This, mainly because sponsors today want to get more out of the investment, and reach a wider group of people. (Jessop 2014)

Sport properties should improve their sponsorship selling by doing their homework, by being good listeners, by treating the relationships as partnerships, by helping to measure the success, by being committed to servicing, as well as by providing post-event fulfillment reports. The sport property needs to get to know the company which they are trying to approach, understanding who the company is and what they do and stand for is outermost important. The sport property furthermore needs to listen to the company’s objectives and goals, and thereafter try to translate that into an opportunity for the company that the sport property can offer. The relationship created by a sponsorship should be treated as a partnership, as it should be a win-win situation for both parties where the sponsor is not only a checkbook but has an opportunity to work together with the property. To help satisfy their sponsors, sport properties need to be able to help measure the success of the company’s inputs in order to justify their efforts. Properties also needs to put a lot of effort in servicing the sponsors, since it is an important task to make sure that the sponsors’ needs and goals are met and that the property employs creative, qualified team members that understand the complexity of sponsorships. Lastly, it is appreciated by sponsors to get a post-event fulfillment report delivered by the sport property, a report that provides evidence of the success of the sponsorship. (Need To Know 2013)

Executives from Premier Partnerships and Sponsorship Marketing Group points out a few tips on how best to sell sponsorships. The sport property needs to tell a story; a story of why the partnership is going to be strong and authentic (in addition to facts and figures). They need to remember what their goal is; the current goal is often to be able to
move forward to the next step of the sponsorship selling process. The property needs to listen and keep it tailored; the importance of asking the best questions and listening to the responses is highly significant in order for the sport property to be able to customize a proposal, along with researched information about the company’s present marketing campaigns, sponsorship properties and corporate objectives. The sport property needs to find a way to stand out from all the other sponsor-seeking properties, they need to be different in a positive way by being creative and authentic to their brand. They need to keep it professional as well as simple; e.g. using page numbers, keeping attachments to practical sizes, using PDF formats on files and keeping the font easy to read. (Quick Hits: Sponsorship Sales Tips 2014)

According to Lee and Ross (2012) there are a few factors that influence companies’ decision to sponsor a sport property. These criteria are therefore important for the property to understand in order to most successfully attract and raise an interest from companies. The factors included are presented in Table 2.

Table 2  Factors influencing companies’ decision to sponsor

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The strength of the team’s fan base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The presence of a star player or coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Media coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Average attendance at games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The team’s image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The performance of the team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Hospitality opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The fit between the sponsor and the sport property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>The interest level of the sport in the area/country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Competitors engagement in sponsorships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Lee & Ross 2012)
The different factors affect the company’s decision-making in different degrees, depending on the company’s objectives and goals. (Lee & Ross 2012)

Sport is also considered to have a distinctive capacity to surpass cultural boundaries with the help of “non-verbal and universal messages of hope, pain, competition and victory” (Amis & Cornwell 2005:225). Culture can however affect the way companies and sponsors react and respond to the teams’ marketing activities directed towards them (Eagle et al. 2013:324). Consumers are influenced by culture as an external factor. Culture can be defined as: “a set of attitudes, values and beliefs shared by a group of individuals, which guide and influence behaviours and reactions to various stimuli, and are usually expressed through rituals and symbols used to express these values and beliefs.”. (Lambkin, Foxall, Van Raaij & Heilbrunn 1998:248)

When it comes to the end of the process of attracting sponsors, the sport property needs to be able to deliver a proposal that catches the business’ attention. The sport property needs to make sure that the proposal is direct, clear and short. It is also important that the proposal is focused on highlighting all the benefits the sponsor would get by sponsoring the sport property. A good proposal should consist of the main sponsor benefits as well as background information about the sport property and the event. There are four main factors that make a proposal successful. These four factors are: 1) emphasis on the benefits the sponsor would receive, 2) a letter that is customized and especially written for the sponsor (or at least the sponsor’s business category), 3) the sponsorship fees, and 4) a confirmation that the sport property will get back to the company to hear what the situation and decision is, within a certain timeframe. (Securing Sponsorships 2005)

When a proposal has been sent and read, the following step for the sport property is to contact the right person in the company to make contact with and to set up a meeting. During the meeting with the company, the sport property needs to state the objectives of the meeting, present the main sponsor benefits and highlight the key selling points, ask questions in order to receive feedback, expand on the main selling points, and lastly they need to listen to the company’s objections and address them accordingly. (Securing Sponsorships 2005) The process of managing sponsorships would thereafter move on to the securing of sponsors.
2.2.2 Securing sponsors

In order to secure sponsors the sports marketers can follow four different steps, however remembering that the ability to be flexible is crucial, but that an organized process enables you to be better prepared when negotiating. The four steps according to Calzada (2013:153) are: “1. Auditing and mapping, 2. Sponsorship programme, 3. Sales dossier, and 4. Sales and contract”. These four steps further include different sub-steps. (Calzada 2013:153) The process is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 The process of securing sponsors.

Source: Calzada (2013:153).

The first step of auditing and mapping requires deeper understanding and knowledge not only of the market, but also of major brands and other sport properties and their approach to sponsorships. The first step hence includes analytical work which focuses on three main areas; “1. Mapping of sponsorship programmes”, “2. Audit of available rights”, and “3. Inventory of advertising spaces”. The mapping of sponsorship programs (sponsorship programs explained more in the next paragraph) includes mapping the sponsorship programs of your competitors, as well as the result of these programs. This activity will later help to identify potential sponsors. By auditing available rights the sports marketer will get knowledge concerning the ownership and control of the rights
and therefore knowledge of what can be included in contracts. Marketers furthermore need to keep track on their advertising spaces, including the number of advertising spaces available, the number of spaces already taken as well as the number of brands to include on each available space. (Calzada 2013:154-155)

The next step in the process is all about designing the sponsorship program of the team. The sponsorship program can be described as “selling a set of rights and advertising spaces to a single client (the sponsor)” (Calzada 2013:146). When designing the sponsorship program one needs to find an organized structure suitable for this specific sport property. One action that can be helpful is to first arrange all the different sponsors into different categories or levels (e.g. category 1 consists of the main partners, category 2 consists of the premium partners and category 3 consist of the official partners), as well as decide how many levels one should have and how many sponsors should be added to each category. Furthermore, in the process of designing the sponsorship program one should consider having no more than one brand from one specific industry to sponsor in order for the business to get a preferable advantage. To further make the designing useful, the sports marketer should create a document, stating the different categories, their content, the number of sponsors in each, a price policy, the number of tickets offered to the company to each game, and advertising spaces. To be successful with the designing of the sponsorship programs one needs to remember that the most valuable rights and the most valuable advertising spaces should be given to the sponsors that bring the most money. (Calzada 2013: 157-161)

The third step of the designing of sponsorship programs is the ‘sales dossier’. This step requires that the marketers of a sport property are able to produce a sales report of high quality that according to Calzada (2013:164) would help “1. Attract the attention of the potential sponsor ... 2. Provide all the information necessary ... and 3. Justify the sums requested in an objective manner.”. The document should, according to Calzada (2013:164-167), be structured as shown in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The suggested content of a sales dossier</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>“History and relevant information of the sport property.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>“Positioning and theme of the project.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>“Media exposure.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. “Critical mass.”

5. “Sporting objectives.”

6. “Detailed fixtures list for the season.”

7. “General arguments in favour of the sponsorship.”

8. “Components of the various options available.”

9. “Support material.”

10. “Simulation of business potential.”

11. “Executive summary and the main arguments.”

Source: (Calzada 2013:164-167)

After the meeting with the potential sponsor is done, the sport property needs to revise the proposal (the offer the team makes to the company, what they plan to give and what they request to get) and make the necessary changes required, in order for the proposal to meet the needs of the sponsor. When the changes have been made, the proposal should once again be presented to the company. Once the sports property has received a verbal agreement on the proposal it is time to get a signature on the contract and to close the deal through negotiations. (Securing Sponsorships 2005)

The fourth and final step of the process of designing sponsorship programs is “sales and contracts”. At this stage of the process it is time for the last couple of tasks in order to secure sponsors. The marketer of the sport property still needs to select the candidates that are the most natural to sponsor your specific sport property, and it is always good if the company you consider as an ideal sponsor for example has a manager that is a fan of the team and if the company is active in the community where the sport property is located. The marketer should also outline the general strategy for sales, make sure to arrange as many presentations, meetings and negotiations as possible and lastly the marketer has to make sure to, together with the newly acquired sponsors, sign a letter of intent. (Calzada 2013:168-171) In addition, the sports marketer needs to show the right kind of attitudes when looking to secure the sponsors. These key attitudes include: belief, initiative, determination, enthusiasm, attention to detail, flexibility, creativity, professionalism, passion and positivity. (Richard Woodward & Associates 2013)
Consumers within sports are, according to Blakey (2011:35) influenced by a few internal, external and situational factors when it comes to their decision-making. The internal factors include personality, motivation, learning, perception and attitudes, while the external factors include culture, social class, reference group and family. The situational factors include physical surroundings, social surroundings, task definition, time and antecedent states. (Blakey 2011:35) While some of these factors might only apply to the individual consumer, several of them can certainly be assumed to also affect a business in their decision-making process. The importance of knowing the consumers’ attitudes and decision making can be described as follows: “It is important for product producers and service providers to know which alternative products and brands consumers consider, how they compare these alternatives, and how they select the brand or product they want to buy.” (Lambkin et al. 1998:156).

In order for a company or a team to successfully secure sponsorships they need to be successful in personal selling. It has become even more important to establish long-term relationships between the two parties, meaning the sponsoring business and the sponsored property. (Shank 2009:307-308)

2.2.2.1 Personal selling

Successful selling is all about asking questions of the customer, providing the necessary information about what one is trying to sell and being able to justify one’s claims. It is furthermore important to acknowledge the opinions and viewpoints of the customer, as well as agreeing with the perceptions the customer might have. One should additionally support the customer in the best way possible as well as release any tensions that might exist. Lastly one should gain a deeper understanding of the customer, increase the effort one is putting in to the process as well as believe in one’s own skill as a seller. A seller should further show a few different characteristics in order to fully be successful at selling. The characteristics include: expertise in the product or service one is trying to sell, good communication skills and problem-solving abilities. A seller should further need to understand the need of the customer and be able to satisfy these. Lastly, the seller should be thorough and be able to give the customer exactly what the customer has intended to buy. (Jobber & Lancaster 2009:248-249)

To be a successful seller one needs to be good at listening, follow-up effectively, be able to change one’s selling style depending on the situation, be able to stick to the tasks at hand and be well-organized. In order to be successful, it further requires that one is a
good verbal-communicator, have the ability to meet and consider any objections, effectively close deals, as well as being able to manage one’s time and have great negotiation skills. The seller also need to be creative, show empathy, make decisions and have good prospecting skills. (Johnston & Marshall 2013:36) Personal selling moreover consists of nine different essential elements or characteristics. These elements are: 1) continuous feedback, 2) effective convincing by the salesperson, 3) flexibility, 4) efficiently promoting sales, 5) providing the right and sufficient information, 6) beneficial for both parties, 7) the creation of a relationship, 8) remembering that personal selling is a process, and 9) great problem-solving skills. (Rajput & Vasishth 2008:93)

2.2.3 Maintaining sponsors

Once the contract is signed it is time for the sport property to meet all the requirements stated in the contract, to over-deliver on the promises they made and renew the contract annually, or whenever the contract is about to expire. A successful sponsorship program is one where sponsors want to come back year after year, and it is only when the sport property’s sponsorship program is highly successful that the sport property really will have a profitable income stream. (Securing Sponsorships 2005) The job is however not done as soon as you have signed the contract with the new sponsor. As soon as the contract is signed, the sport marketer needs to start considering and working for a renewal of the contract, and just as importantly, how to improve the renewed contract for both parties. There are six different components that play a role in the process of renewing contracts. These components include the commitment to all of the following factors: publicity, quality, service (constant interactions with the sport property), protection (against e.g. ambush marketing), information (e.g. about the sport property’s activities) and profitability (giving the sponsors more than stipulated in the contract, e.g. extra tickets, get the players involved in the sponsor’s events and new advertising spaces). (Calzada 2013:213-215, 217)

According to Chadwick and Thwaites (2005), both the sponsor as well as the sport property need to proactively manage the sponsorship program in order to successfully maintain sponsors, and renew sponsorship contracts. The relationship between the sponsor and the sport property should be understood in terms of what each party can do for the other and what they can do together. The sport property needs to offer more than just an advertising space; the sponsors are paying customers and should be treated accordingly and gain more than one benefit from their sponsoring. It is significantly important that
both the sponsor and the property realizes the importance of the other, and hence treat their relationship as a partnership of equals. The property needs to make sure, even though they might not be the best team, that the sponsor feels that they have received the best sponsorship opportunity because of successful cooperation and engagement. Both parties should further focus on long-term benefits rather than short-term success. In addition, both the sponsor as well as the sport property should remember that equal power in the relationship benefits both in the long-run, with nobody gaining more power and therefore an unfair advantage within the partnership. To add value to the relationship, both parties need to be creative and innovative to develop activities, discover new media opportunities and manage the relationship. (Chadwick & Thwaites 2005) The relationship approach seems to significantly have an effect on a business’ continuing success (Hougaard & Bjerre 2009:28-29). According to Calzada (2013:20), businesses that additionally gain more from the sponsorship contract than expected, and stated within, will more likely renew their sponsorship contract with the sport object.

There are nine key points to follow in order to renew sponsorship contracts. The key points are as follows in Table 4.

**Table 4  Nine points to renewal of sponsorship contracts**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Effective communication and committed staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Successful management of the sponsors’ visibility and making sure that their visibility is coherent with their level of sponsorship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Education among the sport property’s customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Making sure the sponsor is well received by the audience by positioning it well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Communicating the sponsor’s role with the sport property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Highlighting which benefits the sponsor brings to both the attendees as well as the sport property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Active management of the expectations the sponsor has.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Planning and execution of research among the property’s customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Documentation of results, and production of assessment reports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Provision of help in order for the sponsor to figure out their return on investment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Arrangement of different sponsor meetings and workshops.

9. Validation that something new is offered to the sponsor every time the contract is to be renewed, keeping the sponsorship fresh by diversity.

Source: (Securing Sponsorships 2005)

It is significant to remember both as a sport property as well as a company, that sponsorship relationships should be seen as strategic alliances, however, the potential for these strategic alliances is fairly unexplored (Amis & Cornwell 2005:225). In the highly competitive sports market, it is increasingly important for sports marketers to build and improve long-term relationships with the sponsors (Shank 2009:339). It is only in recent years that literature has started to consider sponsorships as more than just a transaction, and it is now seen more as a partnership, where both parties benefit from the relationship (Bühler & Nufer 2010:92). It is important to remember the significance in taking care of the relationships established between the company and the customer in order for continuous exchanges to occur, and for the possibility to become, and remain, successful on the market (Grönroos 1996:13).

Sponsorship relationships are considered to be symbiotic, which means that both parties within the sponsorship, both the company sponsoring as well as the sport property, work together for the benefit of them both, increasing their individual market potential. By using symbiotic marketing activities in sponsorships, both parties will benefit from the relationship. A closer relationship between the different sponsorship partners will most likely lead to better results for all. In order for the relationship between the two parties to be successful, trust needs to be built, a mutual understanding needs to be agreed upon, a long-term commitment from both parties needs to be established and communication as well as cooperation need to work smoothly and effectively. One of the key factors for a successful relationship is the cooperation between the sponsor and the sport property. Both parties also need to be prepared for e.g. negative player behavior, so that situations like these can be handled by honest and open communication as well as careful management of the media, and actions can be taken to prevent the termination of the relationship and the sponsorship. (Cornwell 2014:120-121, 124-125)

A business relationship consists of multiple qualities, and the most important ones are: co-operation, commitment, trust, power, long-term, frequency, adaptation, attraction, proximity and distance, formalizing and openness, routine, content as well as personal and social properties (Gummesson 2002:37-43). The quality of the relationship is multi-
dimensional. At least two different dimensions are said to exist, trust in ones’ partner as well as satisfaction with the partner. Commitment is also seen as an important factor of a successful relationship. The will to invest in the relationship, an expectation of the continuity of the relationship, mutual understanding of needs, social bond as well as profit can also be seen as factors that affect the relationship between sponsorship partners. From a business-to-business perspective cooperation is an important factor for a high quality relationship, with both parties working for the benefit of both, as well as adaptation and atmosphere. The quality of the relationship directly influences the quality of the service given and received in a positive way. (Ka-shing & Ennew 2004)

By establishing strong relationships between oneself and the sponsor, the communication between the two parties will after a time become easier and more open, feedback can be received from partners that one trusts, and generally, it is a lot less costly to keep existing partners than to find new ones. In order to establish a relationship with a business, the property needs to first focus internally on the property’s marketing goals, strategies, analyze their present culture as well as establish congruence of the stated strategy and culture. (Cann 1998) According to Cann (1998) there are eight different steps to follow in order to establish and build business-to-business relationships. These steps, as shown in Table 5, include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eight steps in order to build B2B-relationships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Set marketing goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Define the marketing strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>State the business culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Determine the congruence of the business culture and the business strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Activate a business culture that is focused on servicing the customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Implement the company’s marketing strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Develop social bonds with the customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Increase the value of the relationship.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Cann 1998)
The property has to provide excellent service to their partners in order to establish and maintain long-term relationships, and it is therefore important that the strategy and the business culture are both in line. Promises made to one’s partners need to be met at all times, which is a key aspect when it comes to giving exceptional service. Personal interactions between the personnel of the property and the company are crucial in order for both parties to determine their satisfaction with the relationship as well as whether or not they will continue the relationship. In addition, the property needs to be able to offer the business something besides the regular and ‘normal’ transactions, more than just providing quality service. The property must hence make an extraordinary effort by offering exceptional service and social bonding. By satisfying ones’ partner, loyalty and long-term relationships are most likely the outcome. (Cann 1998)

If one is able to establish a strong relationship between oneself and the customer, competitors will have a hard time challenging the relationship, and difficulties in attracting the customer to move away from their current relationship to a new one. For a company to really differentiate themselves and get a competitive advantage among all the competitors, it is important for them to create, build and preserve relationships, which means companies should learn how to initiate and maintain profitable relationships. Relationships are considered to be an intangible asset for the companies, and are an external resource which cannot be fully controlled. (Hougaard & Bjerre 2009:15-16)

One of the most substantial aspects of relationship marketing is that it is necessary for the business, or the seller, to identify and clarify the customer’s customers’ needs and demands in order to fully be able to offer their customer something that continually satisfies their demands (Hougaard & Bjerre 2009:35). It is furthermore essential for businesses to link their marketing with their customer service and quality in order to successfully achieve customer satisfaction as well as long-term relationships with their customers. It is important not to treat these aspects separately, but rather together. (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne 1991:4)

Every business searches and strives for customer loyalty, however, loyalty can only be requested, and it must be earned. Customer loyalty is considered to be one of the most important assets a company can gain. Among customers, loyalty is reflected in “the different degrees of belonging, preferences and decision criteria”. (Hougaard & Bjerre 2009:65, 69, 73)
A few of the sponsors might hold an important role in the survival of the sport property, due to them bringing a bigger proportion of the revenue. These companies can be referred to as key accounts. The key accounts are usually in business-to-business markets considered to be such customers that show a willingness to enter a relationship and who are most often of huge importance strategically to the other. (Fill & McKee 2012:319) If the relationship with one of the most important accounts, or sponsors, is terminated, the loss could end up not only being economical but also show a loss in for example reference benefits, learning benefits as well as innovation benefits (Wang & Brennan 2014).

In order for a sponsorship agreement and partnership to be fully successful, both parties need to truly work together. Within sports, it is the establishing and maintaining of successful relations between the sport property and its stakeholders that are considered to be relationship marketing. The relations that are built between the two should be positive, long-term and beneficial for both in order to be considered highly successful. There are five important factors that determine whether a sponsorship relationship is successful or not. According to Nufer and Bühler (2010) these factors include: trust and understanding of each other’s objectives, working for the long-term, effective communication as well as collaboration. An important aspect of making a sponsorship successful is that the sport property continually works actively on strengthening the relationship, as well as truly committing to the relationship using the necessary staff and time needed, as well as know-how. It is further important for the sport property to remember that they have to handle several different sponsors, and hence also different kinds of relationships. It is therefore important to understand the different aspects within sport sponsoring that concerns relations. (Nufer & Bühler 2010)

One must make sure that the sponsor is happy and satisfied at all times, constantly interacting with the sponsors and building stronger relationships while at the same time offering great service. The ‘ideal sponsor experience’ is important to take into consideration and strive after during the entire relationship with the sponsor, from first contact to the last. According to Calzada (2013:2012-2012) there are ten different touch points the sport property needs to consider in order to create the best possible experience for their sponsors. These touch points are: sales dossier, empathy between managers, announcement of agreement, advertising impacts (e.g. advertising spaces, media and news coverage), VIP treatment (during games and other events organized by the sport property), sport property staff (specially dedicated to the sponsor that are accessible, shows
commitment to and has time for the sponsor), priority for new assets, sponsor protection, information given (e.g. about all on-going activities) and feedback (given by the sponsor to the sport property). (Calzada 2013:210-212)

A sports team with a selection of different sponsors in its network, further has the possibility to act as a broker between its sponsors, whether it is between two or more. By giving its sponsors the opportunity to create relationships with other sponsors, the sport property enables a greater value of the relationship as they render a business-to-business service that not only improves the business’ image and the customers’ awareness. The sport property has an opportunity to activate the network resources that they have available with all of their sponsors, and they can as a result for example host sponsor summits. By acting as a broker and arranging conferences, the sport property can give the business-to-business companies a chance to connect, and make business with other sponsors. (Cobbs 2011)

The inter-personal relationships that are established between the sponsor and the sport property, can be useful when negotiating, discussing or rejecting enquiries made by the sponsor. With the establishment of trust, the management of the sponsorship will be easier and the relationships created are significant, especially in the renewal process as well as during negotiations. (Morgan, Adair, Taylor & Hermens 2014)

2.3  A summary of the theoretical framework

Based on the theoretical framework presented above, two figures have been generated in order to summarize the key points that have been made concerning the management of sponsorships and the process of gaining sponsors as well as the factors that affect companies’ decision to sponsor. The first figure will be called the “managing sponsorships” and the second figure will be called ‘factors affecting the sponsor’s decision making’.

Figure 2 summarizes the key factors mentioned in the theoretical framework above when it comes to the attracting, securing and maintaining of sponsors. First, a sport property needs to attract sponsors by researching the available sponsors, their goals and objectives as well as the similarity of values and messages. They need to target and sell to the right businesses, as well as to the right people within the business. They further need to find possible sponsors that are a good fit with the team when it comes to objectives, image, goals and message. The sport property needs to differentiate themselves from other properties looking for sponsors, by for example offering the best sponsorship agreement,
by showing commitment and by adding additional value. In addition, the property is expected to give promises as well as to fulfill them, especially when it comes to offers and benefits. As a way to stand out, and to establish long-term relationships, the sport marketers are required to offer the potential sponsor such value and benefits that the company sees it only beneficial and necessary to join the partnership. Lastly, in order to attract the best sponsors, the sport property needs to show the right kind of attitude by being flexible, creative, enthusiastic, passionate and positive.

Figure 2  Managing sponsorships

The process continues with securing the sponsors. This step requires the sport property to be able to engage in personal selling, personalizing their selling to the specific company and making sure that the company feels valued. The sport marketer further needs to be able to show flexibility concerning for example the contract and conditions to be stated. The contract and the relationship has to be customized to fulfill the company’s needs and objectives and hence add value to the partnership. It is crucial that the sport property establishes a relationship with the sponsors for the best chance of long-term success. And of course, the contract with all the agreements made, needs to be signed by both parties.
To maintain the sponsors one has acquired, the sport property has to improve the sponsor's situation by adding to and improving the contract and the relationship that has been established. The sport property needs to furthermore add more value and benefits to the sponsor. Both parties have to commit to the relationship and take responsibility for it while continually building trust, understanding and proximity. Both parties have to actively manage the sponsorship program, not letting it just exist. Furthermore, the two parties are required to develop their communication with each other (by for example being honest and direct) and collaborate in order to most successfully arrive at a win-win situation. Lastly, they need to balance the power in the partnership so that no partner has more power than the other and can use this to their own advantage. A strong and successful long-term relationship will benefit both parties as they work together, and so the relationship should be strengthened as much as possible. Hopefully, if this process succeeds the sponsor will renew their sponsorship agreement and the relationship will stand.

Figure 3  Factors affecting the sponsor's decision making

The key factors affecting the decision making concerning sponsorships in a business are presented in Figure 3. These factors are crucial for a sport property to fully understand and show knowledge of, as having that knowledge can help the property in their process of managing and selling sponsorships. These factors include the fit between the property and the business, the media coverage of the property which gives the business an in-
creased opportunity to be seen by the property’s customers, the business’ goals and objectives and whether these goes with sponsoring a specific team at a certain place and time. The relationships created are also a key factor in the decision making process, as stronger, more personal relationships can come to benefit the company in several different ways (when networking with other sponsors, negotiating and discussing with the property and so on). The team itself and whether it has any star players or coaches, their performance, the strength of their fan base and the attendance as well as the interest for the sport in the community, are all factors that also play an important role. A sponsorship can give a business a competitive advantage over competitors, and customers’ awareness and knowledge of the company’s brand and products, as well as their sales, can be increased. Finally, the company can receive a certain value from sponsoring a certain team, not only by achieving their goals and objectives but also through collaboration and the established relationship.

With the help of the theoretical framework, the results of the empirical study will be analyzed. The summarizing figures will be used as a tool in order to efficiently compare the Finnish ice hockey teams to the Swedish ones by using the same points of measurement for all teams and sponsors respectively. The interview-guides that were used for the empirical study are based on the theoretical framework, making sure that the necessary questions will be answered in order to fully understand and compare the teams as well as the sponsors on the issues relevant for the aim of the study.
3 METHODOLOGY

The following chapter will present the methodology of this thesis. The chapter will present the research method chosen for the empirical study, the sampling strategy, the collection of data and the design of the two interview-guides.

3.1 Research method

As a qualitative research method rather uses words than numbers, and as the qualitative method rather is built up around open-ended questions, contrary to a quantitative research method that is built up around closed-ended questions (Creswell 2009:3), a qualitative study in the form of interviews were conducted in order to fulfill the aim of the thesis. Furthermore, a qualitative research method is used to explore and gain an understanding, while a quantitative research method is used in order to test hypothesis and theories (Creswell 2009:4). As the aim is to research the differences between Finland and Sweden when it comes to how they are managing and selling sponsorships, and how sponsors see sponsoring, a qualitative research method will help to give an in-depth understanding (Cooper & Schindler 2011:160) of how sponsorships are sold and relationships built, as well as why sponsors want to sponsor and how.

Due to the fact that the aim of the thesis is to compare two different countries to each other, and in order to get responses that are directly comparable, structured interviews were conducted (Cooper & Schindler 2011:169). However, follow-up questions were asked in situations when the given answer did not cover the necessary aspects and in order to gain a deeper understanding. As a qualitative study, the theoretical framework was used as the basis for the questions, or as a so called “theoretical lens” and the theory hence gave an insight into what questions should be asked in order to get the sought after understanding (Creswell 2009:62). As the theoretical framework was used as a guideline in the designing of the interview-guides and as the theory presented is considered being a truth of the issues, it was used as a starting-point for the analysis and understanding, and the study is hence considered to be deductive (DePoy & Gitlin 1999:18).

With the aim of achieving the purpose of this study, the process of selling and managing, sponsorships, as well as the building of relationships to the sponsors, each teams was studied individually with the help of personal interviews. Furthermore, the thesis also studies the attitudes among the sponsors as well as their reasons to sponsor. As previously presented, two relevant research questions are hence meant to be answered.
• How are relationships between the team and the sponsors built and maintained and how do these affect the sponsorship?

• What are the attitudes of the sponsors, and how do these affect their willingness to buy sponsorships?

### 3.2 Sampling strategy

As the informants needed to have certain characteristics in order to qualify for the study, and in order to increase the comparability among the informants, a non-probability sampling method was used to select the informants. A purposive sample method was used to choose the teams (the teams were deliberately chosen based on a few criterions), while a snowball sampling method was used to select the sponsors (as the contact persons at the different teams chose the sponsors based on a few criterions). (DePoy & Gitlin 1999:206)

The amount of interviews that were to be conducted was decided beforehand, with the possibility of adding more interviews if needed. Most often when it comes to qualitative methods and interviews, the interviewer stops interviewing informants when the interviewer feels that he or she has received enough data, and that he or she is not getting any new information by conducting more interviews. A number between four and eight interviews are recommended, with the possibility of conducting more if necessary. (Trost 2005:123) Four teams were hence concluded to be a suitable amount of teams to be interviewed. Statistically, about 14% of the teams in the Liiga and about 17% of the teams in the SHL were interviewed. In addition to the four teams, five sponsors from each country was decided to be a satisfactory number of interviewed sponsors. Hence, the number of total interviews was set to 14. As the aim of the thesis is to compare teams in Finland and Sweden, the equal amount of teams and sponsors were chosen from each country.

The teams were chosen based on a few criterions. The most important criterion was that all teams were to play in the highest division of ice hockey in the different countries. As the thesis is written on behalf of Vaasan Sport, they were automatically chosen as one of the teams to be included in the study. In order to increase the comparability among the teams, teams that are located in cities with approximately the same amount of inhabitants, as far as possible, as Vaasa were chosen. So, based on the size of the city as well as the availability and time allocation of teams, Porin Ässät was chosen as the second Finnish team. Both Vaasan Sport and Porin Ässät play in the Liiga. Based on the same reasons, MODO Hockey as well as Brynäs IF were chosen as the two Swedish teams. Both teams from Sweden play in the SHL. An overview of the teams chosen and the size of the
cities in which they are located can be seen in Table 6. The persons that acted as inform-
ants from each team were all sales (and/or marketing) managers. All teams participated voluntarily and without pay after contact and an inquiry for participation was made through either mail or by phone.

Table 6  Hockey teams chosen and size of cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number of inhabitants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vaasan Sport</td>
<td>Vaasa, FIN</td>
<td>66 000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porin Ässät</td>
<td>Pori, FIN</td>
<td>83 500**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODO Hockey</td>
<td>Örnsköldsvik, SWE</td>
<td>55 200***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brynäs IF</td>
<td>Gävle, SWE</td>
<td>98 300****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The sponsors from Vaasan Sport, Porin Ässät and MODO Hockey were chosen by the teams themselves, with the criterion that they would differ from each other in some way. Variation in size (how big or small of a sponsor they are) and variation in the time they have been sponsoring (newer as well as older sponsors), were the specified criterions. These criterions were set in order to get a wider variety of sponsors and a deeper understanding of sponsors’ attitudes in general (not only focusing on a certain kind of sponsor). The sponsors from Brynäs IF were chosen randomly from different lists (or groups) of sponsors. Some of the sponsors were asked beforehand by the teams themselves if they were willing to participate, while contact information was received for some. All sponsors were however contacted by mail and an inquiry for participation was made. All sponsors participated voluntarily and without pay. As a few of the sponsors wanted to remain confidential, the decision to keep all sponsors confidential was made. Table 7 shows the number of employees of each sponsor, the main characteristic of the sponsor (new = new sponsor for the season of 2014-15, old = the company has been sponsoring for at least a couple of years, small = the sponsor contributes with a smaller amount, big = the sponsor is one of the property’s bigger sponsors), as well as the advantages, the so called sponsorship content, they receive by sponsoring the specific ice hockey team.
### Table 7  Description of sponsors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Number of employees</th>
<th>Main sponsor characteristic</th>
<th>Sponsorship content (for example)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport sponsor #1</td>
<td>Infra builders</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Old sponsor</td>
<td>Game attire, ad on Sport's website, advertisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport sponsor #2</td>
<td>Telecom and ICT</td>
<td>Approx. 700</td>
<td>Big sponsor</td>
<td>Restaurant, side board advertisement, seasonal tickets, game event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport sponsor #3</td>
<td>Service, repairs, spare part sales for heavy vehicles</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>Small sponsor</td>
<td>Ringside advertisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ässät sponsor #1</td>
<td>Clothing retailer</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Small sponsor</td>
<td>Side board and screen advertisement, loges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ässät sponsor #2</td>
<td>Machine-building industry (exports)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Old sponsor</td>
<td>Season tickets, loges, sponsored player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODO sponsor #1</td>
<td>Food industry</td>
<td>Approx. 70</td>
<td>New sponsor</td>
<td>Media cube advertisement, game event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODO sponsor #2</td>
<td>Engineering industry (metal windows and doors)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Old sponsor</td>
<td>VIP-tickets, the company of the game, advertisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODO sponsor #3</td>
<td>Confectionery industry</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>New sponsor</td>
<td>Game attire, match program, side board advertisement, product sold in the arena, game host</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brynäs sponsor #1</td>
<td>Tourism industry</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small sponsor</td>
<td>Advertisement, partner fair, Brynäs flag at the company on game days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brynäs sponsor #2</td>
<td>Energy industry</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>Old sponsor</td>
<td>Led screen advertisement, network, press releases, articles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.3 Data collection

All informants first need to be contacted in one way or the other, and once they have been contacted the researcher needs to introduce him- or herself shortly, as well as introduce
the study and ask whether or not the contacted person is willing to participate or not. If the interview is not done during the first contact, the interview should be scheduled and the place and time decided. The researcher should at this point also let the informant know how long the interview approximately will take. (Trost 2005:61) All four teams were initially contacted during the fall of 2014, along with a few other teams suitable for the study considering the given criterions, in an e-mail in which they were introduced to the subject and aim of the study. The e-mail also presented the researcher and a brief explanation of what was desired of them was included. As it was expected, some of the teams were too busy with other studies or work, and hence politely declined the inquiry, and the four teams to participate were thereafter confirmed. The teams were once again contacted during January 2015 by e-mail, with the aim to confirm their participation, set a date for the interview, and receive contact information to sponsors. The teams were at the same time informed of the approximate length of the interview as well as of how the interview would be done (face-to-face, by phone or through Skype), as according to Creswell (2009:179) interviews can be conducted either face-to-face, by phone, with a group of participants in a so called focus group or by e-mail. Two of the methods were considered as relevant for this study, the face-to-face interviews and interviews done by phone, depending on where the interviewee was located.

The sponsors were initially contacted by e-mail, as some sponsors had already been confirmed by the teams themselves, a confirmation mail was sent to some while an inquiry for participation including explanations and aim of the study was sent to others. Once the sponsors were confirmed, they were sent another e-mail with the purpose to set a date for an interview as well as a confirmation of how the interview would take place. A few of the sponsors were contacted by phone as it was more convenient at the end of the study when time was restricted. The researcher then first introduced herself and the study, after which a time and date for an interview was decided upon.

The collection of data was done through interviews conducted during February and April 2015. Out of the 14 interviews, ten were conducted in Swedish and four were conducted in Finnish. When doing a qualitative research the interviews are preferable done in the natural setting of the interviewee face-to-face (Creswell 2009:175), and so the interviews were, as far as possible due to geographical differences between the interviewer and the interviewees, conducted face-to-face at the work place of the interviewee. Of the 14 interviews that were done, six were done face-to-face while eight were done either by phone or Skype (without picture). As half of the interviewees were located in Sweden and a few
of the Finnish interviewees were located further away from the interviewer, the decision was made to conduct these interviews by phone. An overview of when the interviews took place, as well as the approximate duration of them, is shown in Table 8. For clarity, the dates of the interviews that took place face-to-face are in red, all the other were conducted by phone. Furthermore, the interviews that were done in Finnish are distinguished from the ones that were done in Swedish by marking the duration of the interviews conducted in Finnish in green.

Table 8  Date and duration of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vaasan Sport</td>
<td>10.2.2015 at 10.30</td>
<td>approx. 50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport sponsor #1</td>
<td>16.2.2015 at 13.00</td>
<td>approx. 40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport sponsor #2</td>
<td>24.2.2015 at 13.00</td>
<td>approx. 25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport sponsor #3</td>
<td>25.2.2015 at 10.00</td>
<td>approx. 30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porin Ässät</td>
<td>17.2.2015 at 12.00</td>
<td>approx. 35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ässät sponsor #1</td>
<td>17.2.2015 at 14.00</td>
<td>approx. 25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ässät sponsor #2</td>
<td>8.4.2014 at 11.15</td>
<td>approx. 30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODO Hockey</td>
<td>10.2.2015 at 14.00</td>
<td>approx. 30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODO sponsor #1</td>
<td>11.2.2015 at 14.00</td>
<td>approx. 25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODO sponsor #2</td>
<td>13.2.2015 at 14.30</td>
<td>approx. 25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODO sponsor #3</td>
<td>24.2.2015 at 15.00</td>
<td>approx. 25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brynäs IF</td>
<td>28.4.2015 at 20.00</td>
<td>approx. 40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brynäs sponsor #1</td>
<td>20.4.2015 at 9.30</td>
<td>approx. 20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brynäs sponsor #2</td>
<td>22.4.2015 at 10.00</td>
<td>approx. 25 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As recording the interviews gives the researcher an opportunity to listen and focus on the interviewee and the answers given (Trost 2005:54), it was decided that all interviews were to be recorded. The interviews that were conducted face-to-face or through Skype were recorded by a recorder on a phone, while the interviews conducted by phone was recorded by an app called ACR. All interviewees were first asked if recording the interview was all right, as some people according to Trost (2005:54) do not want to be recorded. All interviewees were informed during the interview that they could choose to remain confidential in the study. All interviewees were further thanked for their participation and contribution after the interviews.
3.3.1 Design of interview-guides

When creating the interview-guides for both the teams as well as for the sponsors, the guides were meant to have broad questions in order to get the informants talking more freely (Trost 2005:50). The interview-guides for both types of informants were hence used more as a checklist in order to make sure that all questions that needed to be answered in order to successfully be able to compare Finland and Sweden actually were answered. While a few of the questions were used as starting-points to get the discussion going, some were included as follow-up questions and checkpoints as a tool to effectively notice whether all aspects were answered. In order to be able to compare Finland and Sweden, the informants had to answer the same questions (whether by their own initiative following another question or topic, or by input of the specific question by the interviewer). As a good knowledge of the topic is a good starting-point when creating interview-guides (Trost 2005:50), the interview-guides for both the teams and the sponsors were based on the theoretical framework previously presented. The interview-guide for the teams’ can be found in appendix 1 and the interview-guide for the sponsors’ can be found in appendix 2.

The interview-guide can be shared with the informants beforehand (Marshall & Rossman 2011:144), however none of the informants in this study were given the questions and topics before the interview, but were rather asked on the spot, only knowing what the purpose of the study was. After the first interview was conducted a few smaller changes were done to the interview-guides. The changes done to the interview-guide for the teams consisted of the removal of a few questions that were already answered under another question, or did not give any relevant information on the topic. Example of such questions were “How do you decide which sponsor gets their advertisement where, and how many sponsors from each industry are present on the same advertisement space?” as well as “How do you increase the amount of advertising spaces that you are offering?”. One question was also added to the teams’ interview-guide. This question was “Describe the best possible sponsor (even though you might not have one at the moment).” The changes that were made to the interview-guide for the sponsors consisted of the addition of the questions “When do you consider sponsoring to be successful (from the company’s perspective)?” and “What would you like to receive in order to consider raising your sponsorship investment to the team?”. Changes might be needed as one might realize during the interviews that the interview-guide maybe was not as good as one first had thought (Trost 2005:51). A few things were missing from the interview-guides when the first couple of interviews were conducted, issues that seemed important to include and
had come up by the informants during the interviews, and the issues hence seemed relevant and important and were therefore added to the guide. Some questions on the other hand seemed unnecessary, as the informants did not either have an answer or they were already answered under another topic, and some of the questions were therefore removed due to irrelevance.

The interview-guide for the teams was focused on the topics of attracting, securing and maintaining sponsors, as well as the building and strengthening of relationships. However, the interviews started with brief questions concerning their sponsor situation; how many sponsors they have and how much money approximately they actually get from them. These questions were asked in order to get an actual difference between Finland and Sweden, as the introduction of this thesis states that sports in Sweden get a lot more sponsoring than sports in Finland. The interview-guide for the sponsors was on the other hand focused on their thoughts on sponsoring, both generally as well as specifically for the participating ice hockey team they sponsor. The questions wished to discover why they sponsor, their experienced advantages of sponsoring and their perception of the existing relationship between themselves and the ice hockey team in question. The guide also included questions of what improvements the sponsors feel the team would need to do in order to improve the relationship as well as their input into sponsoring the team. Both interview-guides were broadly based on the summarizing figures presented in chapter 2.3.
4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter will present the results of the empirical study. The analysis and the comparison will follow the results, and the analysis will be followed by the inference and implications of the study. Lastly, the credibility of the study will be discussed, as the reliability, validity and the generalization of the study will be brought up.

4.1 Presentation of results

The results have been divided into four different categories, the Finnish and the Swedish teams respectively as well as the Finnish and the Swedish sponsors respectively in order for an efficient comparison of the two countries later in the chapter to be made. All quotes that are included are translated from either Swedish or Finnish.

4.1.1 The Finnish teams

The Finnish teams will be presented one by one, firstly Vaasan Sport followed by Porin Ässät. The results of the teams are furthermore structured according to the theoretical framework; the attracting, securing and maintaining of sponsors.

4.1.1.1 Vaasan Sport - Attracting sponsors

The contact person at Vaasan Sport (hereafter: Sport) says that during the few years he has been working for Sport, he has mainly been working with old sponsors. As an example he mentioned one of the sponsors that has been sponsoring Sport for about ten years, a sponsor with whom he tries to meet up with a couple of times per season. Sport says that in order to make contact with old sponsors, one first makes a call and then finds a time and date when to meet up with the sponsor. However, when it comes to contacting new sponsors, they first try to see what sponsors other teams have and in case Sport has missed someone that they too could contact and that might be interested in sponsoring Sport as well. Secondly, they go through different lists of companies and entrepreneurs, make some calls, try to set up a meeting, try to tell them about Sport, show statistics of how much hockey is shown in the media as well as try to get them to come see a home game in order for them to experience the atmosphere, as it is a lot easier to show than tell what Sport is all about.
An important point Sport highlighted was that, if the contact person is not interested in ice hockey, or Sport, what so ever, it is very hard to get them to sponsor. It is also hard to get companies to sponsor that are located about an hour north, and south of Vaasa. Even though Sport is the only team in the region (in Ostrobothnia) that plays hockey in the Liiga, it is hard to get these companies to sponsor as they try to focus their sponsoring to local teams. Companies, especially those who are mainly exporting their products, do not feel they would get anything out of sponsoring Sport. Several companies have also said that they want to see how this first season in the Liiga goes, and maybe in the future invest in sponsoring. A couple of industries are also experiencing difficulties at the moment, having to lay people off and those companies can obviously not invest in sponsorships.

One way to find sponsors is also to check other teams and their sponsors, and Sport tries to look at the other teams’ webpages to get an idea of what other teams offer their sponsors and what they do with customers, how do they for example work with ringside-customers (to get ideas how smaller companies such as hairdressers also would join). They also try to find companies that sponsor another team, which they too could get in touch with. To a certain extent they also try to find competitors of a certain company that sponsor one team, and try to get the competitor to sponsor Sport. Another way to find new sponsors is to ask current ones if they know somebody that might be interested. Sport also noted that being sponsored by one certain company in one industry might automatically eliminate the possibility of being sponsored by another company in the same industry. For example, if the drinks offered are Olvi, then they cannot have Koff, and if the sausages offered are Kivikylän, then they cannot have Snellman or Atria.

Sport tries to offer companies, besides visibility through the game attire, the ice, the sideboards, and the illuminated advertisements, so called “Tyky-päivät” (days arranged by companies for their employees and their wellbeing), tickets to the games, but also whatever the sponsor feels they would like. Sport is open to suggestions and tries to give companies what they want, if this is not visibility, even though this mainly then includes the so-called “Tyky-päivät”. One of the new advertisement spots that Sport has added to the season of 2014-15 was on the visor, a spot that has become quite popular as it is on the front of the helmet, and is visible on pretty much every still photo of the players. At times, Sport also has some kind of lectures at companies, together with for example the head coach. Sport further mentioned that they continually try to come up with new services to
offer sponsors. The way to find out about the sponsors’ needs and wants is mainly by talking and discussing with them, asking them what they want.

When contacting companies and trying to sell sponsorships, the presentation and the selling is pretty standardized, however Sport still tries to research each company’s webpage beforehand, in order to gain an understanding for what they do. It is essential that one knows something about the company, for example how many employees they have and what industry they are in. Based on the information they gather, they are somewhat able to plan what they are going to offer, for example, an export company does not get any added value by having their logo on the game attire. One point Sport mentioned was that “the bigger the company is, the longer time it takes to get them to accept”. It is good to have some suggestions ready when one meets the company the first time, suggestions based on what one knows about the company, and then check with the company what they think and how they feel about the presented suggestions.

In order to differentiate, not only from other ice hockey teams, but especially from other teams in the Vaasa-region, mainly from football teams, they try to fulfill their slogan, “The best entertainment in Ostrobothnia”. Moreover, they have the biggest audience in the region, the season is long, and of course, ice hockey “is number one in Finland” and because of that Sport can offer better visibility than less popular sports. With the help of studies that have been made, they can also prove this fact.

According to Sport, they believe that sponsors choose them because ice hockey is the most popular sport in Finland, and this in turn gives visibility in TV as well as other media. Sport is also new to the Liiga, back after 40 years in the second and third highest divisions of ice hockey, and the interest for them is hence very high. People want to see how it works out for Sport during this first season back and they want to be a part of building the success of the team, and hopefully play in the playoffs already next season.

4.1.1.2 Vaasan Sport - Securing sponsors

Sport has thought of grouping their sponsors into different groups depending on the kind of sponsor they are, but have not really done so yet. Their biggest sponsors however, are visible on their webpage, and these are also the ones that are found on the game attire used by the players. Sport noted that they maybe are not as good as they should be when it comes to meeting up with these sponsors. As the different salesmen at Sport have their own customers too, more cooperation between the salesmen would help with that. Sport
mentioned that they did arrange trips to some away games during the season together with customers. During these occasions, the customers get to meet each other as well. Ringside-customers were also invited to a specific game during the season, if they had not yet used their VIP-tickets, which gave them an opportunity to meet other ringside-customers at the same time. Sport mentioned that they probably should be better at arranging things (programs, trips, meetings etc.) for customers, however, their weekly hockey-game where the customers get to play hockey themselves together with staff are highly appreciated. It is of course all about resources.

Contracts usually include visibility for the company, season tickets, Tyky-päivät or loges. No sponsorship contract includes only one of the mentioned services, but it is rather most often a combination of two or more. The services are then gone through together with the customer and they decide on what they want and need, and the quantity of for example season tickets, and number of games they would like to have access to a loge. Some sponsors might sponsor a specific player, and they are then visible on the individual player’s game jersey. The sponsors get to choose which player they want to be visible on, however difficulties occur with this kind of sponsoring as players come and go, some being fired, others being injured or showing up in the middle of the season. These advertisement spots can of course not be sold before the players are signed, and new players for the company’s advertisement need to be found when the previous one disappears.

4.1.1.3 Vaasan Sport - Maintaining sponsors

When it comes time to renewing contracts, Sport always starts out by calling and meeting the biggest ones, especially those that have their logo on the game attire. If one would happen to terminate their sponsoring to Sport, or if they would like to change the services that they are getting, Sport needs to find someone to fill in for them on, for example, the game attire. In order to try to improve contracts when they are renewed, Sport tries to explain that they have raised their budget, and that they of course need sponsors to be able to meet the requirements. They try to make the sponsors understand that with a higher investment from them they would give them visibility, as well as enable the team to get better players and hopefully then also be more successful (which then again leads to more visibility as the season is prolonged). Sport also actively tries to call and offer loges when they are available, as well as players (for visibility on the player) when they feel they have someone suitable available. All renewals are meant to be finished before summer vacations starts, so Sport goes through the sponsors on the game attire, the ice,
the sideboards etc., and then contacts the sponsor in order to discuss a renewal. Everything should preferably be finished before the last of May, as everything should be in order when the new season starts on August 1st – the game attire, the ice, the sideboards and all the illuminated, as well as other, advertisements should be put into place when everything gets going after the summer vacations. Sport notes that they have not been good enough setting deadlines, but they try to put deadlines on their sponsors, and if they have not decided before a specific date, somebody else might take their advertisement spot. But the ones that have a specific advertisement spot (for example on the game jersey), have a priority purchase right for the same spot that they previously have had.

When Sport played in Mestis, most contracts were one-year deals, and most still are. Some of the bigger ones have, for the season 2014-15, signed two- or three-year deals, and that would of course be the best option for Sport as well, having sponsors sign a three-year contract with a raise for every year. Many are however afraid of the economic situation and cannot be certain that the business has the opportunity so sponsor every year, and so they have signed one-year deals. If the contracts were multi-year ones, Sport would have more time and resources to look for new sponsors (instead of every year renewing old contracts) as well as to build the relationships with the old sponsors.

Sport tries to meet all sponsors during the season. When the sponsors have booked a loge or such, the salespeople try to be there and meet up with them. “It is just those who do not actually come to the rink that we never meet.” Sport says that these are not however many. An idea that a customer actually had to give Sport once, was that it would be nice to receive a letter of sorts from Sport a couple of times during the season, with information about the team and the situation the team and organization is in. Sport thinks that sponsors would like more information, inside-scoop and find out about things before the public does, in order to get a feeling of belonging to the team and organization. Creating more value is always important, organizing trips and such for their sponsors to participate in. Next season they are also planning to arrange a trip to NHL for partners, which of course would give them a chance to network with other sponsors as well. During the summer, some golf competition is arranged for partners where the team’s players join as well. Sport however feels that they could be better at using the players, and though players have been participating on some fairs and at stores, it is mostly the injured ones, as the active players have such a tight schedule. Including the players would automatically increase visibility for both the team itself, but also for the sponsors visible around the team, especially on the game jerseys.
The best possible sponsor, the “dream sponsor”, is according to Sport, if you forget about that “one million euro sponsor”, one that has a huge Sport-heart, is interested in what is happening, has a positive attitude, wants to participate and be active, makes suggestions of what can be done and one that can be a reference to other companies. Furthermore, the “dream sponsor” would be one that gives feedback, in a positive way, and wants to work together in order to make the relationship and cooperation better and more long-term.

4.1.1.4 Porin Ässät - Attracting sponsors

The contact person at Porin Ässät (hereafter: Ässät) said that, in order to attract and secure sponsors, basic sales work is set into place. They try to find suitable companies that would be worth approaching and contacting. This leads to phone calls, meetings and negotiations (if the company accepts), and from there they move forward with the process. They try to find companies that otherwise markets themselves a lot, as they try to make Ässät not only an important part of Pori, but also nationwide. They want to offer companies a marketing channel that, in a sports environment, enables them to bring forward their logo or message, companies that want to build their own image in a more sporty direction. Ässät tries to attract companies that are interested in their own brand and their visibility, and of course big companies that have a larger workforce and a lot of customers. Smaller companies are not ignored by Ässät as they do try to attract all kinds of companies, but if they had to choose a certain kind of company some would be more preferable.

When first contacting a company, Ässät often follows to see whom other teams, both in ice hockey as well as in other sports, are being sponsored by. Furthermore, they said that they follow to see what companies market themselves in Pori, they try to ask people if they know somebody that is interested in hockey and in Ässät. When companies have been found, Ässät makes phone calls, then shortly explains what the call concerns and asks for a meeting with the company where they can present their product and service concepts. Ässät is quite a big thing in Pori and in the nearby region, so quite often they are able to set up a meeting and presentation, as people are interested in what Ässät has to say. Once they get to meet up with the company, the job is to convince them to join as a sponsor. During this first meeting, Ässät tries to figure out what the company’s needs and wants are, and maps what they want or if there is some specific target group they want to reach out to. They attempt to find out what kind of marketing they have, what
their message is and whether they find the support for that through sports. Through discussion with the company they attempt to discover what the needs are, and back at the office they brainstorm and try to create a package suitable for those needs.

An advantage for Ässät is that they are pretty much the biggest sports team in Pori playing in the highest possible division, however the economic area is not that big, which is a challenge in itself is. Not far from Pori to the south you will find Rauman Lukko’s economic area (Lukko is another ice hockey team in the Liiga), and of course the companies located there, are supporters of Lukko. North of Pori on the other hand, you do not find a lot of big cities or municipalities and inwards to the country, Tampere is pretty close to Pori with their two teams in the Liiga as well. Furthermore, there is a lack of big companies in the area, however multiple small and medium-sized companies do exist.

The most important advantage Ässät tries to stress when they try to sell sponsorships, is the fact that they can offer a network of maybe hundreds of companies that are included in the Ässät network, and so they try to convince companies that if they join Ässät they get a countless number of new contacts from the business life of Pori. So, they highlight the advantage, that by joining Ässät companies get to know new companies and people, and the companies hence get an opportunity to advance on the Pori market. Other factors in order to sell sponsorships is to give attention to the staff in some way, during game events as well as by giving ticket packages, and by giving attention to the customers, invite them to games and arrange something fun for them and their families. At the moment, Ässät does not talk much about only selling advertisement and sponsorships, but rather about cooperation, and what the customer actually can receive by the cooperation with Ässät. “Take for example a customer that only puts an advertisement on the sideboards, and that is the entire cooperation. I do not think that they get enough value from that.” As Ässät noted, there are a lot of other companies that have their advertisement visible in the arena as well, so the question is whether the customers actually really see one of them. Of course there is some value and significance, but there should rather be more cooperation between both parties.

Ässät offers their sponsors several advantages, but the biggest one is that the sponsor gets to join the network of companies that sponsor Ässät. They arrange several different occasions during the season to which they invite their customers, for example everybody is invited to the first home game of the season. They furthermore also play golf with a bigger group, arrange trips to away games, and give personal discounts as well as other advantages. In order to give customers added-value, Ässät tries to help them promote
their own business, by asking who their customers are and might be, and then all of them are invited to attend a game during which the customer has an opportunity to get to know their possible customers. Ässät is then the common denominator for all parties involved. Ässät tries to give their customers an opportunity to grow their own business and get more contacts through Ässät. Even more, Ässät wants to offer their sponsors high-quality visibility. This often happens when the team works, and hopefully plays well so that there actually is some visibility, and Ässät is able to arrange high-quality events at the arena.

Even though Lukko is pretty close to Ässät geographically, Ässät does not consider them a competitor when it comes to selling sponsorships. None of the other ice hockey teams are really considered being a competitor on this front, as even though another hockey team might have a specific sponsor, it does not remove the possibility that they would sponsor Ässät as well. The teams that Ässät feel that they need to differentiate from are the other sports teams in Pori. In order to differentiate from them, Ässät offers better visibility, and more added value to the cooperation. “We try to offer better experiences during the games and more added value. More and better, is probably the thing.” Ässät further noted that they are a couple of steps ahead of the other sports teams in the region, and they can hence differentiate themselves that way.

4.1.1.5  *Porin Ässät – Securing sponsors*

Most contracts that are signed with sponsors are customized to fit the customer’s needs and wants, as they have different objectives, are different sizes and so on, and hence Ässät customizes the packages and contracts accordingly. Ässät can start out with some kind of frame for a contract consisting of an advertisement space, loge, and a certain number of tickets and so on, but the final contract is always customized for the customer. Beyond the basic advantages, Ässät can further arrange post-game events in a restaurant for some sponsors, the products of some sponsors can be sold at the arena (for example beer or sausages), some sponsors’ contracts consist of events outside of the game, for example some lecture for the staff by the head coach, a playful game for some sponsors can be arranged before a home game, and so on. With one sponsor for example, they have created, on the sponsor website, a possibility for fans to vote on their favorite player, and the players with the most votes are then rewarded each month. The idea was pretty much developed by the sponsor itself, and the sponsor has thanks to this, had several visitors to their website and Facebook-page. According to Ässät they can customize and arrange pretty much anything for their sponsors.
Ässät has divided their sponsors into groups, depending on their contribution. The sponsors are divided into five different groups, the so-called first, second, third and fourth lines, and the fifth group is called “menossa mukaan” (English: getting involved), which consists of sponsors that invest less than the ones in the other groups. Other than these, Ässät also has a group called “pata-verkosto” (English: spades network; spades are the logo of Ässät) with two different levels, which of course get a little less. The bigger the sponsors are, the more actively they are served and the cooperation continuously developed. Ässät feels however that they could cooperate with sponsors more during the season, and most often the cooperation mainly consists of fulfilling the requirements stated in the contract. At times, somebody will get an idea that will work well with one sponsor, and they will then propose the idea and see what the sponsor’s response is.

4.1.1.6 Porin Ässät – Maintaining sponsors

When renewing contracts, Ässät noted that they have to brainstorm new ideas in order to be able to improve on the contracts (for their part, get more money). They say that they need to be innovative, and present these ideas to their sponsors. They added that one cannot just show up and say that the prices have gone up with 25%; as in order to get more you have to come up with new and different ideas and solutions to offer customers.

Ässät feels that they meet their sponsors too seldom, as they have so many, but the biggest sponsors they meet about two or three times during the season. There are however sponsors too that they do not meet a single time during the season, but they try to meet up once or twice every season with everybody. They do nevertheless feel that they should meet up with them more often.

Ässät’s “dream sponsor” would be to have just a few big sponsors (as they now have a large amount of sponsors), with which they could continually develop the relationship and cooperation. With such a situation, they would be able to better give added-value to the customers, the game attire, the arena (the ice, sideboards and other advertisement places) would be better looking and “cleaner” (with less logos) so “that there would not really be an advertising jungle”. So the “dream-sponsor” would be a big, well-known brand with which the cooperation actively could be developed and that resources and time would be enough for both to do so.
4.1.2 The Swedish teams

The Swedish teams will be presented one by one, first MODO Hockey followed by Brynäs IF. The results of the teams are furthermore structured similarly to the theoretical framework; the attracting, securing and maintaining of sponsors.

4.1.2.1 MODO Hockey – Attracting sponsors

The contact person at MODO Hockey (hereafter: MODO) said that they look for all different kinds of sponsors, however to a large part they try to attract bigger, business-to-business companies. MODO further tries to look for companies that have a certain size and an interest in the market in the region of Örnsköldsvik, as well as those who do a lot of representation work with customers. Earlier, national companies were also a target, however it has become more difficult to get national companies to sponsor individual clubs, as they most often rather head straight for the national teams. It is almost a prerequisite that the company, or at least the contact person within the company, is a supporter of MODO Hockey, in order for them to decide on sponsoring the team. As MODO is the only elite team in the city of Örnsköldsvik, they do not have any major competitors for sponsorships, and hence they do not need to focus on how to differentiate themselves from other sponsorship seekers.

As some sponsors leave every year, MODO tries to attract new sponsors in their place. MODO also tries to look at other teams, not necessarily in the region, but rather on other similar teams in other cities, for ideas on what companies they could approach when looking for new sponsors. As Örnsköldsvik does not have any other sports teams that play in any higher divisions, the hockey, and MODO, receive a lot of the sponsoring in the region as hockey takes such a big role on the sports market in the area. Not having any big competitors gives MODO a huge advantage when attracting sponsors. MODO believes that the reason sponsors choose to sponsor them, is that there is a lot of passion and interest in the brand and a lot of sponsors want to be seen in connection to the brand MODO Hockey.

MODO stated that they contact companies according to their business and they usually have different kinds of solutions that they most often have some thought behind. These solutions can include exposure of the brand, advertisement, or visibility on the match program handed out at games, an opportunity to have some kind of display or exhibition or general presence at games. When first contacting companies, MODO makes a phone
call to set up a meeting, and then meets up with the customer to tell them about the thoughts and ideas that MODO has. When MODO sells sponsorships, it is most often of course to existing sponsors. There are basically two different ways to sell, you can for example meet up with the customer, and depending on what target group they have and what they would like to do, come up with a proposal with the discussion as a base. The other option is that MODO contacts a specific company that they believe would like to be seen in a certain context, for example when there is an advertisement spot available on the game attire, and offers them a specific solution. MODO usually brings a catalogue consisting of all the available options for the sponsors, but they mostly ask a lot of open-ended questions in order for them to get to know the company and what they are looking for, and that way understand what solutions they should propose.

4.1.2.2  MODO Hockey – Securing sponsors

MODO offers their sponsors quite a wide range of packages and solutions. Every option is available on MODO’s website, but the options include advertisement on the game attire, on the sideboards, match program, medial cube, led screens, different kinds of signs, ice resurfacer and the possibility to be the company of the game. There are lots of different solutions for companies to choose from. The main service MODO offers their sponsors is of course visibility, however they are trying to move away from that a little. MODO tries to find solutions that maybe are not so focused on exposure, but rather gives the companies a possibility to for example use MODO’s brand and name in their own advertising or use the players at different occasions and for different purposes.

MODO divides their sponsors into four different categories, depending on their investment. These categories are called the first line, gold, silver and bronze sponsors. The sponsors then get different advantages and are able to take part of different services depending on which group they belong to and what their input is. After it has been discussed what kind of cooperation there will be between the team and the company, and then depending on the investment the company wants to make, they end up in one of the categories. Companies hence do not just pick a category and get the exposure that category includes, but the cooperation is rather first discussed. All contracts are then customized and adapted according to the needs and wants of the company.
4.1.2.3  *MODO Hockey – Maintaining sponsors*

MODO said that they need to become better at building and improving their relationships to their sponsors, but that they are, and should, for example do this by arranging unexpected events or happenings for the sponsors during the season. A positive side is also that their sponsors feel an added value by networking and doing business with other MODO sponsors. If the sponsors get such opportunities and feel they are getting an added value from the sponsorship, then the sponsorship is valued higher in the eyes of the sponsor. MODO arranges four different network-get-togethers every season. To these get-togethers they invite all sponsors, and they arrange different lectures and give the sponsors an opportunity to network with each other. This gives the sponsors an opportunity to exchange business cards or even do business together.

The goal is always, when renewing contracts, to raise the investments from the companies, as it gets more and more expensive to have a hockey club, and negotiations will be held with the sponsors. Of course not all are willing to accept a raise in the price. “There is a lot of hard work that needs to be done, no oddities.” MODO says that they need to become better at keeping in touch more tightly with their sponsors, with for example more meetings, in order to make negotiations easier when the time to renew contracts comes. By building good and open relationships to sponsors, the transition into negotiations will be more successful and natural.

As MODO has a lot of exposure not only on the web but also in newspapers and on TV, MODO’s “dream sponsor” would be one that has a national interest. A company that can value the exposure that they are able to get in different kinds of media by sponsoring MODO would be the “dream sponsor”. A “dream sponsor” is a sponsor that, by being visible on the game attire and elsewhere (for example on the sideboards), is able to appreciate and value the space that creates in the media. Such a sponsor would of course generate a higher investment compared to a local actor who invests with a lot of heart.

4.1.2.4  *Brynäs IF – attracting sponsors*

The contact person at Brynäs IF (hereafter: Brynäs) said that Gävle is a big ice hockey city with a lot of support. They are five sellers that work with 100-130 sponsors each. Brynäs prioritizes personal visits to their sponsors, as this is one of the things they have found out is appreciated by their sponsors through customer surveys. The companies that are interesting sponsors are those local companies that they know historically have
supported Brynäs, companies that have long traditions with the team and that continually would like to support Brynäs. Brynäs says that they prioritize their existing sponsors, however, the attracting of new sponsors are prioritized when there is time. Brynäs looks for companies within a 12 miles radius from Gävle.

Brynäs says that they meet up with their sponsors when these are in loges, at games and at other events during the season as they for example arrange breakfast as well as lunch meetings, where Brynäs has a high presence among the companies. “The focus is not always on selling, but building good relationships and making sure that they are satisfied.” Brynäs furthermore conducts customer surveys annually in order to find out the needs and wants of their sponsors, as well as their satisfaction, or dissatisfaction – what they are pleased about and what not.

Not long ago, Brynäs wanted to increase their revenue, and so they created a new structure for their sponsorship program. Brynäs had at the time of the change reached the ceiling of what they could get from existing sponsors, and not one more krona was added. A time comes when there is no more space for advertisements, and as one more company adds its logo to the mix, the value of the exposure decreases, as it is not as efficient to stand among many as it is to stand alone or among just a few. Brynäs then decided to create a clean game attire, they wanted less logotypes, but more work together for a good cause.

Brynäs differentiate themselves from other sport properties by being one of Sweden’s strongest sports brands. Brynäs furthermore has great talent development, producing 18 NHL players during the last 7 years among which Nicklas Bäckström and Jakob Silfverberg are two of the most known. Brynäs has a strong history and 13 SM-golds (Swedish championship golds), which further differentiate them. The one thing however that differentiate them the most form others, is their long-term contract with UNICEF and their A Good Start business, which enable them to not only differentiate regionally, but nationally as well as internationally. Brynäs is the first, and only, ice hockey team in the world in cooperation with UNICEF, joining the football teams Manchester United and FC Barcelona.

Brynäs said that it is basically impossible to attract a really big sponsor, it does not simply work. One cannot only focus on hockey when the rest of the world is focusing on sustainability and social responsibility. Brynäs wants to contribute to a better world, and that is why A Good Start is not a project or an activity, but a part of their business. Just as Brynäs
became a great developer of talents because people constantly work with it, it comes naturally, in the same way they want to make A Good Start just as naturally. In that way Brynäs is able to differ themselves from everybody else worldwide. With their clean game attire they are able to stand out from the majority. Today every team looks the same. They have the logos on basically the same places on their game attire, on the ice, on the sideboards and so on, so by making their game attire free from all other logos than Brynäs’, UNICEF’s and A Good Start’s, they distinguish themselves from all the others. The companies stand behind the game attire rather than on it. By being a sponsor and partner to A Good Start and to the clean game attire, a sense of proudness is created, because who minds being a part of something where the goal is to help children worldwide. And it is not that difficult to create a clean game attire, one only needs to get the companies on the same page by explaining and discussing. It was not enough for Brynäs to work traditionally anymore when they were looking for higher investments, but they had to think outside the norms and create something with huge potential.

4.1.2.5  Brynäs IF – securing sponsors

Brynäs divides their sponsors into different categories. The two top categories are the main sponsors and the official sponsors. The main sponsors sign contracts for 3 to 5 years while the official sponsors sign contracts for 2 to 3 years and invest less than the main sponsors. Both of these two categories are connected to UNICEF, A Good Start and the clean game attire. A Good Start is Brynäs’ own business for every child’s rights. The clean game attire is a symbol for all the children’s rights, and by having a clean game attire Brynäs are able to create a discussion about the issues. The companies are not visibly on the game attire itself, but they rather stand behind, or within, it. The aim is to work for the children and not for their own logotypes.

The third category of sponsors are the so called gold sponsors, and the fourth is the cooperative partners. When Brynäs re-structured their business concept, they imagined a triangle, in which they wanted to broaden the tip. As there are not a lot of really big companies in the region, Brynäs wanted to attract companies outside of the region, and hence they created the clean game attire and began a cooperation with UNICEF as it is something different from what everybody else does. The question about sustainability is topmost on the agendas of big companies, and if Brynäs themselves are able to master it, and if they are able to offer social sustainability, they are able to receive higher, and more, sponsorship investments. That way they would also be able to broaden the tip of their
triangle, so they could secure more companies that invest larger amounts of money. When Brynäs re-structured their sponsors, they wanted to keep the small and medium sized sponsors in order to have a solid ground to stand on, these are then the gold partners and the cooperative partners. These sponsors might buy more sign exposure, morning hockey, trips to away games, an opportunity to be a game host, participate in events – it is so to say more traditional. The sponsors also have an opportunity to combine different products to reach a specific sum and sponsor category, and these products might include tickets, exposure or led advertisements. Brynäs also has 48 loges available at the arena, 40 of which are rented to companies each year.

A lot of companies also support Brynäs’ development of talents, the children and youngsters that will join Brynäs in the future. Brynäs also has a so called 1912-club (the ice hockey club was established in 1912), which consists of about 1000 companies that invest either 1912 or 2912 Swedish kronor. Brynäs also has so called flag partners, companies that they have asked if they want to flag with a Brynäs flag on the days of a home game. These companies are then presented on Brynäs’ webpage. Brynäs does not look much at what sponsors their competitors in the region have, for example Gefle IF (football team), but they rather work together to strengthen each other and in that way gain more.

When companies become either a main sponsor or an official sponsor, they do not just become a partner to Brynäs but also for their business A Good Start. The partners then support Brynäs’ hockey, at the same time as they work together for A Good Start. As a main sponsor, one is a strategic partner to A Good Start, and their competencies are used in order to build and improve the business; the main partners also participate in the management team of A Good Start. Official partners also work with Brynäs on A Good Start and they are then strategically active within a certain section. A Good Start works regionally, nationally as well as internationally, with Brynäs giving UNICEF at least 1 million Swedish kronor every year during the duration of the contract, money that at the time helps children in Bolivia. In order to become a main partner or an official partner, one also needs to be approved by UNICEF, and hence the criteria for becoming such a sponsor is quite high, but at the same time, it increases the value of being such a partner to Brynäs. The sponsors, or partners, need to be able to show that they actively work with sustainability issues, and most importantly social sustainability questions and children’s rights. The process of securing these partners are pretty long, about 1 to 1½ years, but then again it concerns a lot of money, and Brynäs needs to make sure that the companies are the right ones and want to partner up for the right reasons.
4.1.2.6  *Brynäs IF – maintaining sponsors*

Brynäs meets up with all of their partners every year. As the main partners are part of the management team of A Good Start and as they work together with A Good Start, Brynäs meets their main sponsors continually during the year. Project meetings are also a place where Brynäs meets its main and official sponsors. The great masses (all the other partners) are met during breakfast hockey, away games, lunch networks, breakfast meetings with different themes and lectures, in short, during different kinds of social events where the relationships can be built and where Brynäs gets a chance to talk to them all. There are 28 games a year, during which Brynäs meets the sponsors, and they prioritize a high presence from the Brynäs organization among the sponsors, so that they can talk to them and find out how everything is. As different companies prefer to participate during certain kinds of events, Brynäs tries to offer a wide range of different events that would attract all sponsors at one time or the other. The sellers at Brynäs are furthermore often in contact with their sponsors, and the sponsors also call the sellers at Brynäs. In this way, Brynäs can strengthen the relationships they have to their partners.

Brynäs tries to give their partners everything they have promised, continually trying to solve their needs as new ones arise all the time. The added value is received from the little things, which for example includes easy access to get to the arena, that everything goes smoothly and that Brynäs offers good hosting. Brynäs says that one first needs to deliver on all the things one has promised, and then, one can consider delivering an added value.

When it is time to renew and improve the contracts, Brynäs tries to make sure that the main partners and the official partners receive some kind of business value. If one creates good things within sustainability, and social responsibility questions with such a strong brand as UNICEF, the partners are able to both nationally as well as internationally work for a good cause, something they themselves can communicate through their communication channels. Most importantly however, Brynäs conducts customer surveys every year in order to find out how satisfied, or dissatisfied, the sponsors are, and with that information they develop their own business concept on every level. If the sponsors have a need that Brynäs feels that they can help fulfill, they do it. Brynäs says that it is important to continually explore what the sponsors need and want, otherwise one is only guessing. It is also a lot about the small details; that it for example is easy and possible to buy tickets, arrange for special diets and so on. If negative reactions or feelings are discovered, Brynäs further asks the sponsor about the issues so that they best can solve the problem. Brynäs gives their partners information about new players, news and
events. Brynäs tries to be open and transparent towards their sponsors, they want to create a sense of belonging and fellowship. If a company supports Brynäs, then Brynäs wants to make sure that they feel that they are a part of Brynäs as well, no one is more “Brynäs” than the other. Brynäs does not see the companies as being sponsors, but rather as being partners to them – “we do this together - without them, we're nothing”.

Brynäs’ “dream sponsor” (or partner) is a company that wants to support the hockey and at the same time work as a global role model for UNICEF and A Good Start together with Brynäs. The “dream sponsor” would furthermore be a company that has a strong brand but that also delivers within the frame of social responsibility and sustainability, and that prioritizes these questions. Most importantly, it is not the name that is important, but rather their substance. For example IKEA would be a “dream sponsor” as they are a global, Swedish brand with a lot of focus on social responsibility and the idea of simplifying the everyday life of families.

4.1.3 The Finnish sponsors

The results of the sponsors of Vaasan Sport will first be presented, and are followed by the sponsors of Porin Ässät. The sponsors are not presented one by one, but rather as a unity, with their differences mentioned and highlighted to some extent if these are relevant and notable.

4.1.3.1 Sport sponsors – the reasons for sponsoring

The companies that sponsor Vaasan Sport (hereafter: Sport sponsors), and that were interviewed for this study said that the reason that they sponsor, generally, is because they either feel a sense of responsibility to support teams or in order to receive some kind of advantage from sponsoring. Two of the sponsors mentioned that it is a chance for them to improve their image. They further choose to sponsor in order to be able to create a positive picture of their brand. It creates a chance to build a feeling of security for the sponsors’ customers when these are in contact with the sponsoring company. The companies are also able to improve the recognition of the brand and get a chance to stay in the mind of the consumer. Other reasons for sponsoring were the possibility to network with possible customers, an opportunity to make business (either by meeting possible customers in the network of sponsors or by taking customers to see games), and in order to get something back on their investment. The reasons the sponsors said they had cho-
sen Sport as an object to sponsor, were that ice hockey is the most popular sport in Finland and hence, it gets the most attention and so has the biggest potential to be covered in the media, and followed by supporters and others. As there are a lot of people present during the games the advertisements are seen by a lot of people. Furthermore, the sponsors mentioned that visibility and an opportunity to reach new, and old, customers was a reason for sponsoring Sport. Sport was further considered by one of the sponsors as being active, and this was hence one of the reasons they sponsor Sport.

4.1.3.2  Sport sponsors – the sponsorship benefits

On the question what the sponsors feel the advantages are with sponsoring, they all said that, in one way or another, it enables them to build relationships with their customers. One of the sponsors said that it creates a discussion around the table (around what team one is the supporter of and so on), while the other two said that it enables them to take customers out for dinner and a game, and hence a chance to build trust as well as the relationship between the sponsor and their customers. By improving the relationships, the possibility that business will be made is greater. Another advantage was that customers might recognize the brand of the sponsor and so get a positive feeling of the company, and brand, as they have seen it before and because they might sponsor a team that the customer supports.

4.1.3.3  Sport sponsors – the sponsorship relationship

All three sponsors considered the relationship between themselves and Sport to be good. Everything works as it should and the relationship is professional and simple. One of the sponsors said that the relationship could in some ways be improved. The sponsor mentioned that they notice that Sport is new and a bit inexperienced as to how they should work in the Liiga, and that routines could be developed compared to other teams, but that improvements are of course made the longer they work in this new environment. All sponsors feel that they are being met in a positive and suitable way by Sport, however one sponsor felt that they could be more active in developing new ideas. The sponsors said that all interactions and cooperation are stated in the sponsorship contract that they have signed, but that the actions for example include loges, visits, game events, away games, networking and opportunities for customers. One of the sponsors said that not a lot of active cooperation occurs, but that is mainly due to the sponsor’s limited resources.
4.1.3.4  *Sport sponsors – the selling of sponsorships*

For one of the sponsors, that has been a long-time sponsor of Sport, the selling of the sponsorship feels like routine, but that negotiations of course are held whenever needed. Another sponsor said that visibility is not enough, and Sport needs to be able to prove the advantages or benefits companies are able to get by sponsoring Sport. Sport needs to be better at arguing for what sponsoring a team in the Liiga gives the companies, and that the way they sell can be improved. The third sponsor said that there is always room for improvements, and that developing new concepts and packages are essential, they do however feel that Sport is on the right track. They also emphasized the importance of customizing the packages and contracts of all sponsors.

Two of the sponsors mentioned that they, in order to consider raising their sponsorship investment towards Sport, would need to be able to get new customers thanks to the fact that they have sponsored Sport, and due to the fact that the sponsor has been able to use the advantages they have received in order to do business themselves. One of these two also said that they would like more visibility in order to consider raising their investment. The other of the two also said that they want to be able to prove that they have gotten customers thanks to the fact that they have made business at the arena, as well as built relationships, taking part of the restaurants and games. The third sponsor said that they would consider investing more when the team is more successful and the sponsor would therefore get more attention and coverage in the media.

4.1.3.5  *Sport sponsors – successful sponsoring*

According to the Sport sponsors, successful sponsoring, from the sponsors’ perspective, is when the company is able to get back what they have invested into the sponsor object, preferably even more. Successful sponsoring also occurs when the feedback one gets from customers are positive and the advertisements are visible and seen by people. Lastly, one of the sponsors said that successful sponsoring is when the media covers the team frequently and for a long time, especially through pictures on different media as well as on TV (especially when ones brand is visible on the game attire), as the more pictures that are taken and published, the more the brand is seen.
4.1.3.6 Ässät sponsors – the reasons for sponsoring

The companies that sponsor Porin Ässät (hereafter: Ässät sponsors), and were interviewed for this study, said that the reason they sponsor is because they want to support their local teams and because they personally have an interest. One of the sponsors however said that they do not really sponsor anyone else than Ässät, as all their customers are abroad, and they do not see sponsoring in Finland beneficial for them to gain more business or customers. They do however want to support the local ice hockey team because they personally are interested and because Ässät is something positive in the city, and they want to be able to help them. The other sponsor said that they sponsor Ässät because it is a tradition at the company, they have done so for several decades already, and so it is a longstanding relationship.

4.1.3.7 Ässät sponsors – the sponsorship benefits

The Ässät sponsors find that the advantages they receive by sponsoring Ässät is mainly that they are able to offer their employees an opportunity to go to games on their spare time, and that the personnel gets to enjoy something off work. Furthermore, one of the sponsors said that one of the advantages is that they are able to take customers with them to games. As the sponsor has a sponsored player, and if the player scores and the company’s name is announced at the same time as the goal, the customers of the sponsor get a positive feeling of the company, which can help when doing business with them. The sponsor further said that, as all their customers are from abroad, taking them to see ice hockey games when they visit Finland, is for many customers exciting and exotic and can help build relationships.

4.1.3.8 Ässät sponsors – the sponsorship relationship

The sponsors said that they find that the relationship between them and Ässät is good, one of them has quite a close relationship as he has earlier been a member of the board of Ässät and as they have a longstanding sponsorship relationship with the team. The other sponsor said that they have a so called “supporter-relationship” to the team, but that they do not really have an active relationship with them. One of the sponsors said that they would like to see that Ässät would be more innovative and creative when it comes to creating new sponsorship products, services and events in order to further improve the relationship, proactively finding new services and solutions to offer sponsors.
The other sponsor said that he did not find that the relationship would need to significantly be improved. The sponsor said that they could have a better relationship with their sponsored player, but that the relationship has not been developed due to the company itself as they have not had a suitable occasion to which they could invite their sponsored player. The sponsor however feels that a relationship between them and the player is not necessary, as the sponsor did not regard that to be part of the player’s job. The Ässät sponsors mentioned that they are well met by Ässät, however one of the sponsors mentioned that Ässät could notice the customers and the sponsors better. The main collaborations between the sponsors and Ässät are stated in the contracts, and includes loges, seasonal tickets, advertisements and so forth.

4.1.3.9 Ässät sponsors – the selling of sponsorships

The sponsors found that the way Ässät is selling the sponsorships is okay, however one of the sponsors said that they could be more innovative and creative when it comes to offering the companies different sponsorship contents. The sponsor further said that Ässät could rethink their products and services in order for the sponsors to be able to get something new and different.

The sponsors considered their sponsorship investments to Ässät to be a way for them to be able to support and help the team, however the two sponsors interviewed said that they do not believe that they get back what they are investing. One of the sponsors further said that they do not even expect to get anything back, not anything more than they already get by receiving seasonal tickets, occasions to use a loge and the sponsored player, as the main reason for them to sponsor Ässät is to support them. One of the sponsors said that it would be good to know and understand what the value of the sponsorship is, and by knowing that they could maybe consider raising their investment.

4.1.3.10 Ässät sponsors – successful sponsoring

One of Ässät’s sponsors said that they feel that the sponsorship is successful when both parties feel that a win-win situation occurs. The sponsor further said that if both parties feel they get something out of the sponsorship, the relationship will last long and the cooperation between the two parties will continue long-term. Another sponsor said that they feel that, in order for the sponsorship to feel like a success, the team needs to do well, as well as their sponsored player. The sponsor mentioned that if, for example, their
sponsored player scores, then they will get more visibility and be heard in the arena as well, and all will feel satisfied.

4.1.4 The Swedish sponsors

The results of the sponsors of MODO Hockey will be presented first, and are thereafter followed by the sponsors of Brynäs IF. The sponsors are not presented one by one, but rather as a unity, with their differences mentioned and highlighted to some extent, if these are relevant and notable.

4.1.4.1 MODO sponsors – the reasons for sponsoring

The companies that sponsor MODO Hockey (hereafter: MODO sponsors), and that were interviewed, said that they see sponsoring as a way to be seen by customers, both current and possible future ones. One of the sponsors said that they get a chance to be seen in the city of Örnsköldsvik and show the public that they care. Another sponsor said that sponsoring gives them an opportunity to support local teams and events. The third sponsor however said that sponsoring gives them a possibility to reach out to new customers and to educate them about their products by for example giving samples to taste. The sponsor further said that sponsoring gives increased visibility, especially as they try to increase their market share in Sweden. The reasons the sponsors choose to sponsor are because they get visibility and a chance to reach new customers. One sponsor also said that it is good to sponsor sports, and that new customers get in touch and get accustomed with the company’s brand. Another sponsor said that the reason they sponsor is to contribute to a living society and an opportunity to contribute with good will.

One of the sponsors said that the reason they chose to sponsor MODO was because the sales men happened to be out in the right time, and because of reconstructions at the store, they wanted to reach out to new customers. The sales person also did a good presentation of MODO, which led to increased interest from the company. They further felt that it would be an interesting place to be seen at and a good market place, and they got a customized package that suited them well. Another sponsor felt that sponsoring MODO was a chance to support the region’s hockey team and create discussion with customers and suppliers. The third sponsor stated that they sponsor a couple of teams in the SHL and that the reason for choosing MODO was because the sales man was an old acquaintance, and they wanted to be able to get new customers to taste their products, and
by sponsoring MODO their products are the only ones of the specific product category to be sold in the arena.

**4.1.4.2 MODO sponsors – the sponsorship benefits**

The MODO sponsors feel that the advantages of sponsoring MODO is that by being seen in association with MODO, the customers might get a positive picture of the company. Other advantages also include, according to one of the sponsors, a sense of unity in the company and among the supporters of MODO, and an opportunity for customers and suppliers to see that the company is active. By sponsoring MODO they are also enabling MODO to continue playing, and hence the arena with many possibilities remains (giving the area an arena where they can experience other things than hockey as well). One of the sponsors said that hockey is such a big sport in Sweden and hence it gives the company lots of visibility in the media. The sponsor further feels that seeing the brand in other contexts than in the store will help customers to recognize them when later shopping for the specific product.

**4.1.4.3 MODO sponsors – the sponsorship relationship**

The sponsors feel that the relationship to MODO is very good and one of them said that MODO listens to the company and thinks of new ideas and concepts. The relationship is professional and one sponsor said that they have a lot of contact with MODO. The sponsors feel that MODO could improve the relationship by meeting up more often and discussing new ideas and solutions with sponsors. However, all the sponsors feel that they are being met in a very good way by MODO. Moreover, improvements could be made by considering how to act when meeting up with the sponsors. The sponsors cooperate with MODO in different ways, some of the possibilities include arranging a Christmas party (which one of the sponsors had arranged at the arena last year thanks to the contacts at MODO), and a cooperation to collect money and create awareness for the Pink Ribbon in the month of October.

**4.1.4.4 MODO sponsors – the selling of sponsorships**

The sponsors consider the selling of the sponsorships by MODO to be good. The sponsors feel that MODO shows an interest to meet up, and they are very active as well. It is said that MODO really listens to what the company needs and rather asks what MODO can do for them. They moreover do not talk money before a solution of what to give and take
is agreed upon. The sponsors feel that the sales persons are very good at MODO, and one of them likes that they have a lot of contact. The sponsors especially mentioned their own contact person, as one that listens well, discusses with the companies and shows an interest in them.

One of the sponsors said that in order for them to consider investing more they would like to see more activity from MODO at their company, and be able to use the brand of MODO in association with their own brand. They said that they for example would like to see players or coaches show up at the store and offer customers something, or, just show up in order to create a connection between the team and the store. Another sponsor said that they would like to see more digital marketing, and a chance to use the brand, and logo, of MODO in association with their own brand, especially on their webpage. They would also like visits from players or coaches to the company when they have customers. The third sponsor would like to have increased sales of their products in the kiosks as well as to have a good return on their investment.

4.1.4.5 MODO sponsors – successful sponsoring

When asked what the sponsors considered being successful sponsoring, one sponsor said that successful sponsoring is when both parties get something back, and when the team and the company are shown together and a fellowship between the two is created. Another sponsor said that they consider successful sponsoring to be when they give to teams that also has youth and child activities and when the company’s brand is seen and recognized. The third sponsor said that they feel the sponsorship is successful when they see that the customers notice, and show an interest for, their products and their brand and when the communication between themselves and MODO is good.

4.1.4.6 Brynäs sponsors – the reason for sponsoring

The sponsors of Brynäs IF (hereafter: Brynäs sponsors) said that sponsoring can be a good thing. One of the sponsors said that they try to move away from sponsoring, and rather become a partner to the sponsor object. The sponsor further said that they want to be able to make a difference together and strengthen the positive commitments made in society. The reason they sponsor is to cooperate. One sponsor said that the reason they sponsor is to become a top of mind-company, while the other sponsor said that they want to strengthen those actions that are already good, and together cooperate in order to raise the quality of life in the region. The sponsor also said that they want to support those that
engage in projects outside of their main activities (in this case, activities outside of ice hockey). The reason the sponsors have chosen to sponsor Brynäs is that, as one of the sponsors said, it is a big club and the payback is hopefully quite big. Another reason for this sponsor was also the partner fair that is arranged for the partners, and which gives the sponsor an interesting network in which they can market themselves to other Brynäs sponsors. Another sponsor said that they feel it is important that the region has elite clubs as it helps to put Gävle on the map. The sponsor also said that they are cooperating with Brynäs because they want to be there to show their commitment. The sponsor said that they want to sponsor Brynäs’ work and efforts in the society, for example the project A Good Strat (a part of Brynäs’ business which helps children and youngsters), which the sponsor is an official partner of.

4.1.4.7  Brynäs sponsors – the sponsorship benefits

The sponsors consider the advantages with sponsoring, or partnering, to be the network of partners available, as well as the fact that the club is a positive thing in the city of Gävle and hence has a lot of fans. One sponsor also said that an advantage is the flag they can raise outside their store on every game day, which gives a more local touch to the store and showcases their support. The other sponsor said that they have a need to be seen in positive contexts and that it is fun to be a part of them. By being seen in positive contexts customers can make a connection between the sponsor and the team, as well as recognize that the company is committed to the city. The sponsors also said that they want to be able to contribute to a sustainable society, and by partnering with Brynäs they get an opportunity to be seen and mentioned in articles about, and press releases made by, Brynäs in connection to their activities outside of hockey. The sponsor then has a possibility to share these articles on their own social media. For example, the sponsor was mentioned in an article about the players that, through A Good Start project, had been helping pupils with their homework. The advantage according to this sponsor is that they can make a difference together through their common work.

4.1.4.8  Brynäs sponsors – the sponsorship relationship

The Brynäs sponsors said that the relationship between themselves and Brynäs is very good and that they arrange several meetings during the year, however one of the sponsors said that they personally do not have time to attend all the meetings and occasions
arranged. The sponsor also said that they feel that the communication between themselves and Brynäs is very good and that they are able to together come up with new ideas and services to offer both to the customers of the sponsor as well as Brynäs’ customers. The other sponsor said that the relationship is really good and that the network that exists enables them to brainstorm ideas to make the arena better, they communicate well, they ask each other for advice and Brynäs also participates in the events the sponsor arranges. The sponsor mentioned furthermore that the relationship has become a lot closer during the last two years, as they want to work together. The sponsors however did not mention that any direct improvements need to be made to the relationship as it is so good at the time being. The team and the sponsors cooperate quite a lot, and one sponsor said that Brynäs for example use them as a travelling agency at times, especially when they are travelling by boat. Another sponsor said that they cooperate with Brynäs in the existing network, however, the sponsor also tries to make the arena as energy efficient as possible, in order for the arena to be environment-friendly. The sponsor said that these aspects require continuous cooperation.

4.1.4.9 Brynäs sponsors – the selling of sponsorships

The Brynäs sponsors said that the selling of the sponsorship works very well. One of the sponsors said that they are very proud to sponsor a team that has good basic values and they are happy to stand behind them, and the game attire free from sponsors’ logos. The other sponsor mentioned that the selling process to become a partner is long, and it takes a while before an agreement is made on, for example, what activities the sponsor or partner, wants to be seen in connection with. But once the contract is signed it lasts for three years, as it takes a while in order to make a difference and create change.

The sponsors explained that at the time being, they do not feel that they would be able to give, or receive, more than they are currently getting and giving. One of the sponsors said that one thing would then maybe be that Brynäs would use the sponsor in a wider extent so that the sponsor in that way would get some more money “back”. The other sponsor said that they are very happy with the current cooperation and it is working very well as it is with the possibility to consult each other, discuss and participate in the same network.
4.1.4.10 Brynäs sponsors – successful sponsoring

When asked the question when the sponsors feel that the sponsorship is successful, one of the sponsors answered that they feel it is successful when the team is successful, and hopefully, when the team is doing well, the sponsor can get something back in return. The other sponsor responded that they feel a partnership is successful when a third party (meaning not the sponsor nor the team) is happy and satisfied, and when for example articles are written about what they have done to make somebody else happy, while mentioning the sponsor and the team. An example the sponsor gave is when the players of Brynäs went to schools to meet up and help pupils, which made the pupils were happy and hence, the partnership was successful.

4.2 Analysis of the results

The results will be analyzed and discussed in two different parts. Firstly, the teams in Finland will be compared to the teams in Sweden, and the results will be discussed. Thereafter, the sponsors in Finland will be compared to the sponsors in Sweden. The analysis and the comparison is divided into two different parts in order to clarify where the differences between the two countries lie, and further, what implications the possible differences may have.

4.2.1 The Finnish teams vs the Swedish teams

As the amounts invested into sport sponsorships, and in this case ice hockey sponsorships, are assumed to differ between Finland and Sweden, the four teams were asked how much sponsorship investments they get. After converting all numbers received in Swedish kronor to euros, and after calculating the average sponsorship investments received by the two teams in Finland, as well as the average of the two teams in Sweden, a difference can be noted. The difference between Vaasan Sport and Porin Ässät is approximately as big as the difference between MODO Hockey and Brynäs IF. The difference between the average number in Finland and the average number in Sweden is approximately 47%, meaning that Swedish teams receive 47% more sponsorship investments than Finnish ice hockey teams, according to this study. It can also be noted that both of the Swedish teams received more sponsorship investments individually than the one with the highest sponsorship investment in Finland.
One of the most noticeable differences between the Finnish and the Swedish teams are that the teams in Finland want to offer their sponsors a great experience at the games, while on the other hand, the teams in Sweden want to offer their sponsors more integration with the team, a feeling of fellowship and belonging. Even though Ässät tries to focus on selling cooperation rather than advertisements, they do want to offer high-quality advertisement opportunities as well. MODO then again, wants to try and move away from offering sponsors exposure, but rather offer the sponsors integration with the team, a sort of fellowship. Furthermore, the teams in Finland seem to be focusing more on giving their sponsors visibility that can make a difference (though Ässät also tries to focus more on their network), while the teams in Sweden seem to be moving away from “sponsoring” and instead move in the direction of “partnering” (especially at Brynäs) – working together with the sponsors, creating a sense of belonging and fellowship between all the actors.

Brynäs is the team that gets the highest amount of sponsorship investments, and the one team that seems to have a significantly different strategy. Brynäs has adapted a strategy that focuses on what especially big companies appreciate, which is a chance to make a difference and to improve one’s image and reputation. Brynäs has furthermore, unlike the other teams, decided to remove all the logotypes from their game attire that do not have anything to do with Brynäs, UNICEF or A Good Start, but rather have the companies stand behind a clean game attire. A clean game attire is something everybody appreciates as they are better looking and creates a discussion among fans and others. Brynäs has realized that it is not enough anymore to work in the traditional way, as there is not a lot of room for improvements within the traditional views, and way of selling and managing sponsorships, any longer. They have instead created something that enables them to distinguish themselves from almost every other team worldwide, and at the same time they have found a strategy that has a lot of potential as companies are eager to stand behind, support and work together for a great cause.

When comparing the teams in the two different countries, one distinguishes that there are also differences among the teams from the same country. Sport for example tries to focus on the heart of the team, the fans, as well as on the experience and the level of entertainment that is considered to be different from the other teams in Finland. Ässät on the other hand tries to focus on the networking opportunities they are able to offer their sponsors, as well as on brainstorming new and creative solutions for sponsors.
MODO then again, much like Sport, is much about the heart of the team and the supporters, as well as the passion and interest the team brings out in the people in the region. Brynäs, focuses mostly on sustainability and social responsibility. Both Finnish teams and MODO want to improve their relationships to their sponsors, and they all seem to think that they are lacking great sponsorship relationships in one way or another.

Table 9 shows a comparison between the teams, as well as the countries, using Figure 2 in chapter 2.3 as the basis. All the results from the teams have been analyzed and compared to both each other as well as the theoretical framework. In the table, an x indicates that the team, in one way or another, engages in the activity. The countries are further divided into the teams individually in order to clearly see the national differences as well, if such exist when it comes to these specific activities.

Table 9  A comparison of teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vaasan</strong></td>
<td><strong>Porin</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Assät</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ATTRACT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiate</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make promises to keep</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer value and benefits</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right attitude</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SECURE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalize the selling process</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show flexibility</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customize</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish relationships</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign contract</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAINTAIN</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add value</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen relationships</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All of the teams do some kind of research of the companies that they try to gather before they meet up with them. The teams try to find out what industry the company is active in, how big it is, and what their desired solution might be. The Finnish and the Swedish teams alike target companies they would like as sponsors. The teams have different criteria for which companies they target, and though all of the teams try to reach all kinds of companies, they try to especially target those that they find are more beneficial for them, or have bigger possibilities to sponsor than a different kind of company. None of the teams except Brynäs consciously look for companies that would make a perfect fit for the team, concerning the goals and objectives the team has. Brynäs on the other hand tries to target companies that also want to work for a more sustainable society, and most importantly for children’s rights.

The Finnish teams try to differentiate themselves from other sponsorship seeking sport properties, however in different degrees as the number of elite, and more popular, sports vary between the cities. Since ice hockey is the most popular sport in Finland, they already have an advantage over all the less popular sports, however, it does add an extra challenge to the teams as they need to convince companies that sponsoring them is more valuable than sponsoring any other team or sport. MODO on the other hand does not find it necessary to differentiate themselves from other sports in Örnsköldsvik as they are the only elite team present in the region. Brynäs differentiates themselves from not only regional sports and teams, but also from teams around Sweden, and the rest of the world, by actively cooperating with UNICEF and working for better living standards among children. All of the teams make promises to their sponsors, promises of actions to be taken and so forth, and they all try to keep these promises as they deliver on the promises made. All teams also offer their sponsors some value as well as benefits, whether it is advertisements, cooperation or an opportunity to arrange events at the arena, or anything else in-between. The teams give their sponsors benefits and try to add a value to them as well, by adding something more unexpected or a great experience. All the teams show a great attitude, they all have an attitude that shows that they want to improve their managing of sponsorships and develop the sponsorship product and experience by being creative. Most teams also recognize that they need to improve the relationships they have to their sponsors.

When it comes to the process of securing the sponsors, all teams are active in all the activities mentioned in Table 9, in one way or the other. All teams personalize the selling process to some extent, trying to figure out what the companies want and trying to give
that to them. The teams also show flexibility, they might have had an idea to present to the companies at the beginning of the selling process, however when they realize what the company is looking for, or what they need, they make the necessary changes. The teams also show flexibility by being open to new ideas and suggestions and by being able to adapt thereafter. The Finnish teams as well as the Swedish teams all customize their sponsorship contracts to fit each sponsor’s needs and wants, as far as it is possible. All teams furthermore try to establish a relationship with the sponsors at the beginning, getting to know the company and listening to what they have to say. For example, Sport invites possible sponsors to come watch a game so that they have an opportunity to see what Sport is all about, and what they would be sponsoring. After introducing the team to the companies, and after customizing a package that suits the company, all teams tries to get a signature on the contract. All the previous actions and decisions will hopefully automatically lead up to the signing of the sponsorship deal.

When it is time to renew the sponsorship contracts, all teams try to make improvements to the contract. Even though the aim when renewing contracts is for the teams themselves to get more money, an increased investment from the sponsors is basically impossible if the sponsor is not getting something in return as well. Sport for example offers visibility, Ässät tries to brainstorm and be innovative to come up with new ideas and MODO tries to tighten the relationships with the sponsors to make negotiations easier. Brynäs tries to give their sponsors an increased business value and continually conducts customer surveys, something no other team mentioned that they do, in order to find out what the sponsors want, and try to deliver on these. All of the sponsors commit to the relationships they have with sponsors in different degrees, however the importance is that they all do it. Most of the teams seem to be aware of the fact that they should commit more, by for example meeting up more with the sponsors. Knowing that something should be done is a great step towards making improvements. Without the knowledge that they should commit more to the sponsors, changes would not be possible. Brynäs was the only team that did not mention that they feel they need to become better at meeting up and building relationships with their sponsors, as that is one of the things they already prioritize. All teams furthermore try to add some kind of value to their sponsors, an added value to be appreciated and to further build the relationships. The teams arrange different activities for the sponsors, giving them a possibility to travel to an away game and a chance to network with other sponsors, among other things.
Sport, Ässät and MODO do not seem to actively manage their sponsorship programs together with the sponsors, though they do try to improve and build the relationship with their sponsors, and hence in a way manage the sponsorship program, however not in any greater extent together with the sponsors. Brynäs on the other hand constantly works together with sponsors, networking, giving advice and collaborating on different issues. The other teams would more actively need to try to communicate and collaborate with their sponsors, and though they all are in some extent aware of the issue, the teams would further need to establish partnerships with their sponsors, a partnership where they all know what one of them can do for the other and vice versa. None of the teams considered further balancing the power between the team themselves and the sponsors, most likely because the balance already is even. None of the parties are taking advantage of the other, but rather trying to cooperate and create a win-win situation where all of them are somewhat equal. Both teams in Finland as well as both teams in Sweden try to effectively communicate with their sponsors, by meeting up with them and negotiating, however the communication between the two parties does not seem to be fully developed. Brynäs tries to be open and transparent, while for example Sport realizes that a great idea would be to send out information letters to sponsors.

When it comes to collaborating with the sponsors, all teams collaborate with their sponsors in some way, mostly by routine; the sponsor invests and the team gives them something in return that has been decided upon in the contract. In Sweden however, the teams seem to give the sponsors more than decided upon in the contract, for example, MODO let one of their sponsors arrange a Christmas-party at the arena, an opportunity that became available as the sponsor had the “right” contacts. According to one of Brynäs’ sponsors as well, they collaborate by making the arena more environmentally friendly and by giving each other advices. The teams, as already mentioned, recognize that they should improve the relationships they have to sponsors, and hence, it is assumed that the teams, at this time, do not actively strengthening the relationships, though they are trying to. Brynäs continually meets up with sponsors during all the different kinds of events arranged for their sponsors. The difficulty probably lies in the fact that it is more difficult to further strengthen relationships that are long-term and have been for years. It is a lot easier to strengthen a relationship that is newly created, as you do not have anything to start from. Trying to further strengthen a long-term relationship is harder as everything becomes routine.
The teams from the respective countries seem to be more alike than one would assume when considering the difference in sponsorship investments between the two countries. As mentioned earlier the difference between Finland and Sweden when it comes to sponsorship investments is about 47%. However, as a huge difference between the two countries’ teams does not seem to exist, though individual differences do exist in some extent (for example Ässät’s networking strategy and Brynäs’ clean game attire strategy), the question is whether or not the consequential and the significant difference is between the countries’ sponsors.

4.2.2 The Finnish sponsors vs the Swedish sponsors

While there seem to be several similarities between the sponsors in Finland and Sweden, it is the differences that are interesting, as they give an insight into why Swedish teams might receive higher sponsorship investments than Finnish ones. One of the biggest differences is that the Finnish sponsors that were interviewed mostly focused on getting some return on their investment, they seemed to be more ROI (return on investment) focused. The Swedish sponsors on the other hand seem to be more CSR (corporate social responsibility) focused, wanting to support the team out of goodwill and to improve the living standards of the society and support properties that want to help children and youngsters. The Swedish sponsors also seem to want to create a certain feeling of fellowship and belonging to the team, show their customers that they are working together and that they “belong” together (by participating in the game events, by having players or coaches participate in the sponsor’s own events, by working together and showing it). Finnish sponsors are however more focused on being seen by the customers, in the media and the arena, and while sponsors in Sweden too strive to be seen and recognized but in a greater extent do they try to be seen and recognized by being more active (for example acting as game hosts or being active at games by for example offering samples of the company’s products), while Finnish teams seem to, in a greater extent, “just be present” (having advertisements and logotypes visible).

Another difference between the two countries is, that even though sponsors in both Finland and Sweden mentioned the networks that are created with other sponsors, the Swedes seemed to see the value in them and take advantage of them more. Also, when comparing the Brynäs sponsors to the rest of the sponsors (even the MODO sponsors), a significant difference can be seen. The sponsors of Brynäs are talking about being a partner to Brynäs rather than a sponsor, which highlights the fact that they might have more
cooperation and a tighter relationship than that of a “normal sponsor”. The sponsors in Sweden consider the selling of the sponsorships to be really good as the teams listen and show an interest. In Finland however, the sponsors, though they too feel that the selling is quite good, feel that the process could be developed. The sponsors’ main arguments were that the teams need to be more innovative, and new services and products need to be created, and that receiving visibility is not enough for the sponsors.

As previously mentioned, the sponsors are also similar in several different ways. All sponsors for example said that the relationship they are having at the time being with respective team is good, however most of the sponsors said that small changes could be made. Sponsors in both countries consider the sponsorship to be successful when there is a win-win situation, as well as when the players and the team are successful. Furthermore, sponsors in both Finland and Sweden consider the sponsoring to be a success if they get some return on their investment. A difference between the two countries on this item is that the teams in Sweden consider it to be a success when the society gets benefits as a result of the sponsoring of the specific team, for example when the children’s and the youngsters’ teams are helped or when projects and businesses to help children and youngsters are created and carried out. Again, it is noticed that the Swedes seem to be more CSR-focused than the Finns.

By analyzing the answers given by the sponsors, and by trying to determine whether or not they correspond to Figure 3 in chapter 2.3, Table 10 has been extracted. The table shows all the factors that were mentioned in Figure 3 on the factors affecting the decision when making a decision on whether to sponsor or not. As a comparison between Finland and Sweden is being made, the sponsors from each country has been “united” to represent the respective countries as a whole and the table hence shows the answers of the majority of the sponsors from each country (e.g. if three out of five sponsors said, either directly or indirectly, that they sponsor because of the media coverage, then that country’s sponsors are considered to use the media coverage as a decision-making factor). If the decision-making factor is considered to be present in the country, it is shown with an x in the table below. As many of the factors do seem to have some importance for several of the interviewed sponsors, however, not in an obvious way nor in the majority of the country’s sponsors, it is considered that the country does not value that specific factor when deciding whether to sponsor or not.
Table 10  A comparison of sponsors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fit</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media coverage</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals &amp; Objectives</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive advantage</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness &amp; Knowledge</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Neither in Finland nor in Sweden does the fit between the team and the sponsor seem to be of significant importance. While for example one of Brynäs sponsors did say that they have chosen to sponsor Brynäs because they want to support the work Brynäs does “off the ice”, and as the sponsor itself finds that factor to be important for their business and something they too want to participate in. None of the other sponsors mentioned, either directly or indirectly, that the fit between their goals and objectives and the team’s goals and objective was a contributing factor. Hence, none of the countries are assumed to consider the fit between the two parties to be a deciding factor. On the other hand, both countries are assumed to consider media coverage as a huge deciding factor as almost every sponsor in some way mentioned that they want to be recognized in the local region, or nationwide, they want to become a top-of-mind brand or they want to be recognized when participating in something good. The sponsors are also considered to keep in mind the goals and objectives the company has and whether or not these enables sponsoring. The sponsors in both countries are sponsoring because they want to get something in return that fits the company’s objectives, whether it is visibility, increased sales, supporting local clubs, building relationships to their own customers or creating a feeling of togetherness within the company.

The relationship between the sponsor and the team seems to mainly be a decision-making factor in Sweden. Even though some Finnish sponsors mentioned that they have a good relationship to the team or that they appreciate the networks created together with the team’s other sponsors, it did not seem that the relationships were a reason for sponsoring. In Sweden on the other hand, several sponsors said that they want to sponsor because it improves and builds the relationships among the workforce, to customers and suppliers, as well as gives them an opportunity to be part of a network in which they can
further find new customers and start new relationships. Some sponsors also said that the relationship with the team itself enabled them to work together to improve the living standards in the society as well as for example give advice to each other. No sponsor mentioned the team itself to be a factor that influenced their decision-making, nor did anyone mention that the sponsoring was due to a certain coach or player. Some sponsors mentioned that they sponsor the specific team because ice hockey is such a popular sport in the country and has quite a lot of viewers. Some sponsors also mentioned that they find a sponsorship to be successful when the team is successful. However, these factors were only brought up by a few of the sponsors and were not considered to be one of the main reasons, and hence it is concluded that the team is not a factor that affects the decision-making in either country.

Though almost every sponsor in Finland assumes that they get increased visibility and a chance to build relationships with their customers, no one seemed to consider it to be a competitive advantage over their competitors. In Sweden however, the sponsors seem to be more aware of the advantage sponsoring a certain team can have. The sponsors in Sweden said that sponsoring, and partnering, with a team gives them an opportunity to show that they are active in society, that they exist and support the team (fans might prefer for example shopping at companies that sponsor a specific team), that their products, and no competitors’ products, are sold in the arena as this might give them an advantage on the market. Sponsors in both Finland and Sweden want to be recognized and seen by the teams’ customers, and most want their sponsoring to improve the knowledge of the company, and they hope that by being visible and participating at the arena that the viewers’ awareness of their brand will increase. Therefore, both Finnish as well as Swedish sponsors consider the improvement of the knowledge and the awareness of them to be a deciding factor. Another deciding factor for both sponsors in Finland and Sweden, were increased sales. Almost all sponsors said that, by sponsoring the team, they want to get new customers, keep old customers, as well as increase their sales.

While all sponsors state that they get some kind of value by sponsoring a team, otherwise they would not sponsor at all if not only to support the sport property in question, however when it comes to value as a decision-making factor, Swedish sponsors seem to understand the value better. Swedish sponsors seem to highly value the benefit of the sponsorship networks, the cooperation they are having, or can have, with the teams when it comes to improving the society in one way or the other or by developing new ideas together, as well as the benefit of building a tight relationship with the team. Therefore, the
value one can get from sponsoring is considered to be a deciding factor in Sweden. In Finland on the other hand, the sponsors seem to find most value in the return on investment and the visibility created. However, a minority of the Finnish sponsors do find a value in improving the relationship they have to the team as well as improving the cooperation between the two parties by for example brainstorming and discussing new ideas, and the sponsorship networks created, though not in the same extent as in Sweden and so, the value is not considered to be a deciding factor in Finland.

4.3 Inferences and implications

The first and most important inference that can be made from this study is that the difference between Finland and Sweden seems to lie in the attitudes of the sponsors, and so it can be concluded that it is the attitudes of the sponsors in Sweden that enables Swedish teams to receive higher, and more, sponsorship investments. The difference between Brynäs and the other teams are significant as well, and it too can be assumed to affect the sponsoring. However, it is still the attitudes among the companies that seem to result in higher investments for Brynäs, Brynäs has just figured out how to best appeal to the needs and wants of the sponsors more effectively. The teams need to be able to offer a product or service to their sponsors that give the sponsors an opportunity to be seen and be a part of a positive change in the community. If the team itself works with a project which goals are to improve the living standards in the society, and gives companies an opportunity to be a part of such change, as they together work for a sustainable and living society, then the relationship between the two can be improved as well. Figure 4 presents an overview of the inferences made, describing how to most successfully manage sport sponsorships according to the results of this study.
One of the most important things to notice is that the sport property and the sponsor should act as partners instead of just a sponsor and a sport property. The relationship between the two parties is created, improved and maintained by cooperation, communication, networks, meetings, events, attention, interest, appreciation, fellowship and belonging. The two parties need to actively work together, have a common goal and communicate well and often. The communication can consist of information letters, phone calls, meeting, lunches, and so on. The important thing is that one remembers that good communication is the main element and the foundation on which a good relationship stands. The relationship is further tightened and strengthened at meetings, events and networks, places where the sport property and the sponsors get to meet up, discuss, get to know each other and brainstorm on future ideas. The relationship is moreover improved when the two parties show appreciation for one another and realize that they are stronger together, and that they can work together to achieve a win-win situation. When giving the sponsors attention at for example meetings, in the arena or even at the office, as well as when showing an interest in what they do and work for, the relationship can be further developed. Lastly, the relationship can become even better when a sense of belonging and fellowship is created among the sport property and the sponsor – the team
is nothing without its sponsors, and everyone should hence feel as a part of the team, not just being an outsider giving monetary resources.

In order to become successful at managing sponsorships, the sport property needs to, besides build strong, long-term relationships, customize the contracts and the relationship to each sponsor, and create a positive image of the sport property, an image that can attract sponsors as they want to be a part of the brand. The sport property moreover needs to *distinguish themselves* from other sponsor seeking sport properties in order to attract attention and interest from companies. Sport properties need to create new products and ideas, something that distinguishes the sport property from other properties and that appeals to sponsors, by being innovative and creative. To figure out what the needs and want are among the sponsors, the sport property needs to *conduct customer surveys* among the sponsors so that they can solve problems and fulfill needs. Pleasing sponsors often results in more long-term relationships. The sport property needs to offer their sponsors an opportunity to either focus on return on investments, but more importantly give them a chance to be corporate social responsibility-focused, giving the sponsors a chance to work together to improve the living standards in the society, working for a better society for all. The sport properties furthermore also needs to offer their sponsors a wide range of benefits and value, as to best fulfill their needs and wants, as well as give the sponsors some kind of proof of the sponsorship’s worth.

The research questions presented earlier can at this stage be answered as follows:

- **How are relationships between the team and the sponsors built and maintained and how do these affect the sponsorship?**

  As shown in Figure 4, the relationships between the team and the sponsors are built through continuous cooperation and by effective communication. The relationships are further built at meetings, networks, events, and when the team shows an interest, appreciation, gives attention, and creates a sense of belonging and fellowship between the team and the sponsors. Sponsors with a tighter relationship to the sport property are assumed to, according to the results of this study, be more willing to sponsor and support the activities of the sport property. Closer relationships create a foundation on which long-term partnerships can be built.

- **What are the attitudes of the sponsors, and how do these affect their willingness to buy sponsorships?**

  As the study shows, the attitudes of the sponsors in Finland differ from the ones in Sweden. The Finnish sponsors seem to focus on ROI, while Swedish sponsors focus on CSR. The Finnish sponsors further appreciate visibility, while Swedish sponsors appreciate integration with the sport property (using
the brand of the sport property, working together and creating a sense of fellowship). These attitudes and views that the sponsors seem to have about sponsorships cannot based on this study be determined to either affect or not affect their willingness to sponsor. It can however be assumed that the sponsors in Sweden are willing to sponsor more as they are more CSR-focused, and hence want to contribute in a bigger way to the improvement of the sustainability in the society.

As the aim of this study was to explore what lessons there are to be learned regarding sponsorship management by comparing Finnish and Swedish ice hockey sponsorships, it can be said that ice hockey teams in Finland could improve their attracting, securing and maintaining of sponsors by being more creative and innovative when it comes to both distinguishing themselves from others as well as when creating new products and services. The teams would need to find something that can distinguish themselves from other sport properties, but at the same time attract more and bigger sponsorship investments. Based on this study, such a thing would be something that enables companies to be a part of something good, something that improves the society as a whole and lets companies show their social responsibilities. Sport properties in Finland could further improve their managing of sponsorships by improving their relationships to sponsors. This would require the Finnish teams to further develop the sponsor networks, different activities and get-togethers where everybody, with the team individually meeting with one sponsor or by meeting all or a group of sponsors at the same time, can meet and discuss with each other in order to brainstorm ideas, solve problems, fulfill needs, get to know each other or create a sense of fellowship. The Finnish teams could also benefit from conducting customer surveys to find out the needs and wants of the sponsors, and in that way be able to develop on the issues most important to the sponsors. The teams could moreover also improve their management of sponsorships by offering some proof of the sponsorship’s worth to their sponsors. By showing the sponsors what benefits they get and by being able to prove the benefits sponsoring has, it will most likely affect future decisions to sponsor.

4.4 The credibility of the results

The credibility, or the trustworthiness, of the study will be critically discussed in the following sub-chapters. The reliability of the study will be discussed at first, followed by the validity of the study as well as the generalization of it.
4.4.1 Reliability of the results

Four different components can be distinguished within the concept of reliability. The concepts are: congruence, precision, objectivity and constancy. The congruence considers different questions’ similarity to each (different questions that are meant to measure the same thing). Precision is connected to the way the researcher is recording the answers of the questions. Objectivity concerns the issue of whether or not different interviewers are recording different things in the same way. Lastly, the constancy addresses the issue of time, as it is, for a better reliability, necessary that whatever is being studied does not change over time, though in qualitative studies, changes are what one usually is interested in. (Trost 2005:111) The questions of this study were designed in such a way that all aspects that were necessary to answer were, and the questions were hence the same for all of the informants (though different questions for teams and sponsors were designed in order to get an insight into the two different perspectives of sponsoring). As only one interviewer, the author of this thesis, conducted all the different interviews, the objectivity in this study can be considered to be high. All interviews were recorded by either a voice recorder or an app that records phone calls, so the precision of the study could remain high. As the opinions of, and the possibilities within sponsorships are ever-changing, the answers received might be different if the study would be done again, during the next or any following season. People in companies and in the teams change, activities are changed as well as the economy, and so, asking the same exact question of the same teams and companies another time, might result in different answers.

A reliable study is preferably not affected by random influences, for example misunderstandings that can lead to incorrect presentation of the results (Trost 2005:112). As some of the interviews were done in Finnish (not the mother tongue of the researcher), some misunderstandings might have existed, however the questions the study aimed to get answers to were answered, and a dictionary was used when necessary for the transcription of the interviews.

Reliability refers to the question of whether or not the research method gives results that are consistent, whether they are reliable (Emory 1980:132). When considering the study that has been done, one can question whether or not the interviewed sponsors, as they all are active in different industries and are different sizes, have the same possibility to sponsor. However, studying sponsors from different industries gives the study a diversity, which would not have been accomplished by interviewing sponsors in the same, or
similar, industries, or of similar sizes. The results will also be more generalizable as different kinds of sponsors have been interviewed - smaller and bigger companies as well as newer and older sponsors. Another issue that can be considered is the fact that three of the teams chose the sponsors themselves, and the sponsors from the fourth team were chosen by the researcher. However, as different criterions were set for the sponsors, the teams were not able to choose sponsors from the same group but rather had to choose a more diverse group of sponsors to contact and be interviewed. The sponsors chosen by the researcher herself were chosen from the team’s webpage, randomly choosing the sponsors from different groups. Lastly, as Vaasan Sport acted as both the client to the thesis as well as an informant, the reliability of their participation could be questioned. However, as they are themselves eager to find out the differences between Finland and Sweden, as well as how they could improve their management of sponsorships, they were willing to answer all questions thoroughly.

4.4.2 Validity of the results

Validity determines whether the research method and instruments, in this study the interview-guides and the interviews, actually measures what they are supposed to (Cooper & Schindler 2011:280). As the theoretical framework was used as a base for the interview-guides, the questions asked were such that they would answer and find out what the teams and the sponsors say about those aspects the theoretical framework says are significant. The interview-guides were adjusted after the first interviews (that at the same time worked as test-interviews as well as actually necessary interviews), so that they were to cover all the issues necessary (which meant adding some questions while removing other, irrelevant ones). To further improve the validity of the study, research questions were stated and used as a guideline together with the aim of the study for the interview-guides.

Content validity refers to the issue of whether or not the research method chosen provides sufficient coverage of the subject studied or not. In order to determine the content validity of a study, the researcher has to define the problem to be studied and the items that are to be scaled. (Emory 1980:128-129) In order to get the answers needed to fulfill the aim of this thesis, interviews were chosen as the research method to be used, as interviews with teams as well as sponsors enable the most relevant data to be gathered. When it comes to qualitative studies, there is no way to determine the exact validity of the received results. However as the findings received in qualitative studies often are
based on the empirical studies, the results can be seen as valid as the implications are
drawn from the data retrieved during the empirical study and hence gives the implica-
tions a solid ground to stand on. (Denscombe 2009:380) As the study conducted con-
sisted of a number of personal interviews, and as the implications and the inference are
based on these findings, the validity of the study can be contributed to.

4.4.3 Generalization of the results

As qualitative studies often consist of a very limited number of informants, the question
of whether or not the results are generalizable or not arises. Within qualitative studies
generalization is more about in what extent the results from the few informants can be
practiced on other similar cases. With the right kind of information about the informants,
the results could be considered as generalizable or not. With a knowledge of who the
informants are, and what characteristics they have, the results can be considered to be
generalizable for the same kinds of informants. Qualitative studies further benefit from
the fact that the results often consist of detailed and rich data and explanations, which
enable a deeper understanding of the issues that are being studied and hence give the
results a better degree of generalization. (Denscombe 2009:382-383) As this paper pre-
sents the different informants that participated, and as certain teams and sponsors have
been interviewed, the results of this study could in some extent be transferable to teams
of similar type. This paper presents the results of each team individually as well as each
team’s sponsors as a unit, and the results can hence give an insight into all the different
teams and their processes, which in parts can be transferable to other teams and spon-
sors with similar processes.
5 CONCLUSION

In today’s highly competitive market, it is important for sport properties to understand how they most successfully can manage sponsorships. The aim of this thesis was to explore what lessons there are to be learned regarding sponsorship management by comparing Finnish and Swedish ice hockey sponsorships. The thesis also aimed to study how ice hockey teams could improve and build their relationships to their sponsors as well as to examine the attitudes towards sponsoring among the existing sponsors. Two different research questions were further presented with the hopes of further getting a deeper understanding of the issues. The qualitative study that was conducted consisted of interviews with both teams and sponsors. The interview-guides were based on the theoretical framework presented in this thesis. The research questions were answered with the help of an analysis, and an interpretation of the empirical findings as well as the theoretical framework helped in create a figure showing how teams best could manage sponsorships, and the aim of the thesis can hence be said to have been fulfilled. Sport properties in Finland need to build and maintain relationships with sponsors, sponsors that instead should be seen as partners as cooperation between the two are an essential key point for establishing long-term relationships. The sport properties could moreover benefit from being innovative, flexible (customizing services), distinguishing themselves from others, creating a positive image of the property, offering value and benefits, CSR as well as ROI possibilities, conducting customer surveys and offering proof of the sponsorship’s worth. The results were also critically looked over in consideration to the reliability, validity and generalization.

As this study considered the managing of sponsorships when it comes to the attracting, securing and maintaining of sponsors, as well as the attitudes of the sponsors towards sponsoring, it did so without taking into consideration a number of different factors that can be of relevance. As mentioned in the research problem, the difference between Finland and Sweden might exist because of the present economic situation, the lack of competence and resources as well as undervaluing the benefits received by a sponsorship. Examining these other factors that might affect companies’ willingness to sponsor could be interesting for future studies. Another idea for future studies would be to explore what impact the sport brand has on sponsors, as several informants mentioned the passion and the heart of the team as well as its history and championships.
In conclusion one can determine that the challenges of securing more sponsors are becoming ever more difficult to handle, and one needs to be creative and rethinking in order to come out a winner. When one finds a distinguishable factor worth having, one should hold on to it, as it might prove to have huge potential.
SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

Inledning

“Sports is not just a game. It’s big business.” (Ukman 2014) Precis som alla andra branscher fokuserar sportindustrin på att ge sina kunder det de vill ha och behöver, och förhoppningsvis tillfredsställa kunderna på en marknad som är alltmer konkurrensskraftig. Konkurrensen existerar inte endast bland alla sporter, utan dessa sporter måste även konkurera med alla de övriga aktörerna inom nöjesindustrin. Sportindustrin har växt signifikant under de senaste decennierna, och anses idag tillhöra en av samhällets viktigaste och mest vidsträckta samfund. (Shank 2009:4-7)


Eftersom ishockeyn är den sport som ses och följs med mest i Finland, och har haft den positionen under flera år (Sponsor Navigator tutkimus 2014), erbjuder ishockeyn en fantastisk möjlighet för företag att förbättra sin synlighet samt kundernas kännedom om företaget. Nästan 20 % av alla sportsponsringsinvesteringar som görs i Finland går till
ishockeyn (Viinikka 2014), vilket gör ishockeyn till den sport som får mest sponsrings-
pengar i Finland. Sponsringen av ishockeyn är därmed intressant att studera, och kom-
mer därför att vara den typen av sportsponsring som i detta arbete kommer att undersö-
kas.

Motivering av studien och syftesformulering

Sportlag möts idag av stora utmaningar när det kommer till att attrahera företag samt
att säkra dessa som sponsorer (Lee & Ross 2012), och det är därför ett viktigt område att
studera då sportobjekt behöver lära sig hur dom bäst kan locka till sig företag samt be-
hålla dessa. När det gäller sportsponsring hamnar Finland långt efter grannlandet Sve-
rige (Viinikka 2014). Skillnaden mellan sponsringar i Finland och Sverige är signifikant,
och medan sponsringarna under 2012 nådde en summa på totalt 1 140 miljoner euro i
Sverige, var motsvarande siffra i Finland endast 166 miljoner euro (Sponsoroinnin nyky-
tila Suomessa 2013). Av de 166 miljoner euro som i Finland investerades i att sponsra,
gick 55 % till att sponsra sport. I Sverige investerades 72 % av 1 140 miljoner euro i sport-
sponsring. (Jääskeläinen 2014) Under samma år sponsrade svenska företag sporter med
500 miljoner euro medan företag i Finland endast sponsrade sport med 91,3 miljoner
euro. I Finland läggs ungefär 20 % av all sportsponsring på ishockeyn. (Viinikka 2014)

I Finland finns det mycket så kallad sponsringspotential, problemet verkar dock vara det
att ingen vet hur man skall utnyttja den. Utmaningarna i Finland kan vara den ekono-
miska situationen som råder i dagsläget, den kritiska övervägningen av investeringar och
bristen på humana resurser som handskar sponsringarna. (Viinikka 2014) Ett annat pro-
b lem som verkar existera i Finland är att sponsringskontrakten skrivs under allt för bil-
ligt, företag betalar inte tillräckligt bra för de rättigheter och fördelar som de får. Företag
i Finland verkar dessutom tycka att sponsringar tar mycket tid och ansträngning för att
handskas ordentligt, och därför väljer de att inte satsa allt för mycket. (Jääskeläinen
2014) Företag i Finland förstår inte det värde sponsring kan ge dem, och förståelsen för
sponsringar är därmed rätt snäv (Jalonen & Haltia 2015). En av de intressantaste frå-
gorna i denna avhandling är därför vilka skillnaderna mellan Finland och Sverige är när
det kommer till att locka till sig, lyckas skaffa sig och behålla sponsorer och samtidigt ta
hand om relationerna, och hur dessa skillnader påverkar sponsringsinvesteringarna.

Sponsorobjekten har dessutom en ökande mängd konkurrenster med vilka de måste kon-
kurrera för att få sponsorer (Calzada 2013:124), vilket gör jobbet att locka till sig och
skaffa sponsorer än mer utmanande. Sponsringsobjekten behöver inte endast konkurrera med övriga lag inom samma sport, utan även med andra sporter, atleter, ligor och sporadiska sportevenemang. Utbudet av sponsorer är dessutom oftast mindre än efterfrågan (Lagae 2005:54), vilket ytterligare försvårar processen att locka till sig sponsorer.


Syftet med denna avhandling är att undersöka vad man kan lära sig angående hanteringen av sponsorskap genom att jämföra finska och svenska ishockey-sponsringar. Avhandlingen kommer dessutom att studera hur ishockeylag skulle kunna förbättra sina nuvarande samt bygga upp nya relationer till sina sponsorer. Därutöver kommer arbetet även att undersöka hurudana attityder sponsorer har till sponsring. Genom att jämföra två manliga ishockeylag i den högsta ligan i Finland (Vasa Sport och Porin Ässät) med två manliga ishockeylag i den högsta divisionen i Sverige (MODO Hockey och Brynäs IF), samt ett fåtal av deras sponsorer, är målet att kunna dra slutsatser om vilka skillnaderna mellan de två länderna är, och därmed hjälpa lag i Finland att förbättra sin marknadsföring till nuvarande och möjliga framtida sponsorer. Vasa Sport fungerar som uppdragsgivare för denna avhandling.
**Tidigare forskning**


Den bästa möjliga sponsorn för ett sportobjekt är ett företag som har verksamhet i sportobjektets geografiska område, vars beslutsfattare är en av sportobjektets supporter och där företagets värderingar och positioneringar liknar sportobjektets egna. Den optimala sponsorn har dessutom erfarenhet av tidigare sponsorskap, kommer att introducera en ny produkt eller tjänst och därfor har en större budget, och slutligen, ett företag som nyligen har förlorat ett sponsringsavtal mot sin önskan och därmed har extra resurser


När kontraktet har blivit undertecknat är det dags för sportobjektet att leverera allt som har lovats och börja arbeta för en förnyelse av kontraktet (Securing Sponsorships 2005). Sex olika komponenter påverkar förnyandet av kontraktet. Dessa komponenter är: publicitet, kvalitet, service, skydd mot till exempel ”bakhålls marknadsföring” (engelska: ambush marketing), information och lönsamhet. (Calzada 2013:213-215, 217) Sponsorer borde ses som partner, och sportobjektet borde erbjuda mer än bara en reklamplats. Det
är dessutom viktigt att både sportobjektet och sponsorn inser värdet av varandra, och de borde därmed fokusera på långvariga fördelar istället för kortvarig framgång. För att dessutom höja värdet på relationen måste sportobjektet och sponsorn jobba tillsammans, vara kreativa och utveckla nya aktiviteter, nya mediala möjligheter samt hantera relationen. (Chadwick & Thwaites 2005)

Det finns nio olika nyckelpunkter som är bra att följa om man vill förnya sponsorkontrakt. Nyckelpunkterna inkluderar: effektiv kommunikation och förpliktigad personal, hantering av sponsorns synlighet, utbildning riktad till åskådarna om sponsorn och fördelarna sponsorn ger till både sportobjektet och åskådarna, hantering av de förväntningar som sponsorn har, planering och utförande av undersökningar bland kunderna, dokumentation av resultat och produktion av utvärderingsrapporter, hjälp med att ta reda på avkastningen på sponsorns investering, arrangering av sponsormöten och workshopar och slutligen, erbjudande av någonting nytt åt sponsorn varje gång kontraktnichage.


övriga sponsorerna, i vilken de kan bygga relationer och skaffa sig nya kunder, vilket ger sponsorerna ett mervärde av sponsorskapet (Cobbs 2011).

Val av metod och material och genomförandet av undersökningen


Resultatredovisning


MODO Hockey tror att företag väljer att sponsorera dem på grund av intresset och passionen för laget. MODO Hockey har dessutom inga direkta konkurrenter som de måste särskilja sig från eftersom de är det enda elitlaget i Örnsköldsvik. MODO Hockey erbjuder sina kunder ett brett urval av paket och lösningar, dock försöker de ta sig bort en aning från att erbjuda exponering, utan fokuserar istället på att integrera laget med sponsornas och skapa en gemenskap. MODO Hockey delar in sina sponsorer i olika kategorier och de får, beroende på vilken kategori de tillhör, ta del av olika fördelar. MODO Hockey försöker erbjuda sina kunder ett mervärde genom nätverket och de träffar som de ordnar, vilket ger sponsorerna en chans att skaffa nya kunder bland MODO Hockeys andra sponsorer.


Porin Ässats sponsorer väljer att sponsra för att stöda det lokala laget, och på grund av tradition och eget intresse. Fördelarna sponsorerna får är biljetter till matcher, att göra affärer med egna kunder när de tas med på match och att synas band kunderna. Sponsorererna uppfattar relationen mellan dem själva och Porin Ässät som god, men anser att Porin Ässät skulle kunna vara mera kreativa när det gäller att komma på nya produkter. Sponsorererna anser att sponsringen är lyckad när båda partnerna får ut någonting av samarbetet, när relationen är långvarig och när laget är framgångsrikt.

MODO Hockeyss sponsorer väljer att sponsra eftersom de anser att det ger dem en möjlighet att få ökad synlighet, att utbilda kunder om deras produkter och för att stöda och delta i arbetet för ett hållbart samhälle. MODO Hockeyss sponsorer anser att fördelarna med att sponsra är att de har en möjlighet att associeras med MODO Hockey, kunder får en positiv bild av företaget och en gemenskap inom företaget och i staden skapas. Sponsorererna anser att deras relation till MODO Hockey är bra. MODO Hockey försöker komma på nya idéer och koncept, och de samarbetar även med sponsorerna. MODO Hockeyss sponsorer anser att sponsringen är lyckad när båda parterna känner att de får
ut någonting av samarbetet, när en gemenskap bildas mellan sponsorn och laget, när kunderna känner igen sponsorns produkter och när även verksamheten för unga stöds.


**Slutsatser och sammanfattning**

De viktigaste slutsatserna som kan dras av denna undersökning är att skillnaderna mellan Finland och Sverige när det kommer till sponsring främst verkar ligga hos sponsornerna. Det är skillnader i sponsorernas attityder till sponsring som verkar vara den stora skillnaden mellan Finland och Sverige, och antas därför vara orsaken till skillnaden mellan de två ländernas sponsringsinvesteringar. Brynäs skiljer sig dock rätt mycket från de övriga lagen med deras idé om en ren speldräkt och med deras En Bra Start-verksamhet. Det är viktigt att komma ihåg att sportobjektet och sponsornerna skall vara partner i stället för sponsorer, de skall jobba tillsammans och tillsammans nå en fördelaktig situation för båda parterna. Relationen mellan sportobjektet och sponsornerna kan förbättras genom samarbete, kommunikation, nätverk, möten, evenemang, visat intresse för varandra, genom att uppmärksamma och uppskatta den andra och genom att skapa en gemenskap. Hantering av sponsorskap kan förbättras ytterligare om sportobjektet är innovativt och kreativt när det utvecklar nya idéer, särskiljer sig från andra, skräddarsyr lösningarna, skapar en positiv image som lockar företag, utför nöjdhetsenkäter, ger bevis på sponsringens värde, erbjuder sponsornerna ett brett urval av fördelar och värde, samt ger sponsornerna chansen att endera fokusera på företagets sociala ansvar eller avkastningen på investeringen. Ishockeylagen i Finland kan förbättra hanteringen av sponsorskap genom att ta fasta på de saker som de inte redan gör, och som denna studie kom fram till är väsentliga för att framgångsrikt hantera sponsorskap, och implementera dessa aktiviteter till det vardagliga arbetet. Sammanfattningsvis kan konstateras att avhandlingens syfte uppnåddes.
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APPENDIX 1 INTERVIEW-GUIDE FOR TEAMS

- How many sponsors do you have in total?

- How much money have you gotten in sponsorship investments in total during the on-going season (2014-15)?

- Describe your process of attracting sponsors.
  o Which/what kind of companies do you contact? Why?
  o What do you do when contacting these companies for the first time?
  o How do you sell sponsorships? Are all presentations customized?
  o What opportunities/advantages/benefits do you offer sponsors?
  o How do you differentiate yourselves from others looking for sponsors?
  o Which factors/characteristics/opportunities do you think affects companies' will to sponsor you?

- Describe your process of securing sponsors.
  o Do you look what sponsors your competitors have? Why?
  o How are the sponsorship contracts customized to each sponsor? Or are they? Why/why not?
  o Do you divide your sponsors into different categories? What kinds?
  o How do you start a relationship with a company?

- Describe your process of maintaining sponsors.
  o How do you improve the contract?
  o How do you create an added value for the company?
  o How do you build and improve the relationships to your sponsors?
  o How often do you meet up with your sponsors? Why? What do you do?
  o What do you offer your sponsors, besides those benefits stated in the contract?
  o How do you try to find out what the needs of the sponsor is and how do you fulfill these?
  o How do you cooperate with your sponsors?

- Describe the best possible sponsor (even though you might not have one at the moment).
APPENDIX 2 INTERVIEW-GUIDE FOR SPONSORS

- How many employees do you have?
- In which industry are you active?
- What are your opinions on sponsorships overall?
- Why do you sponsor?
- Why do you sponsor Vaasan Sport/Porin Ässät/MODO Hockey/Brynäs IF?
- What are the benefits of sponsoring?
- What do you want to get out of sponsoring? Do you measure this? If so, how?
- What kind of relationship do you have to Vaasan Sport/Porin Ässät/MODO Hockey/Brynäs IF? How often do you meet up/are you in contact?
- How do you think the relationship between you and the team could be improved?
- In what ways do you cooperate?
- What do you think of the way the team is selling sponsorships on? Why?
- How do you want to be treated by the team?
- What would you like to get in order to invest more?
- When do you think that the sponsoring is a success?