

## A perfect weekend in Gothenburg



Photos: Tommy Höll, Leo Girod

More than 170 participants from clubs, leagues, federations, and hockey business participated at the 3rd E.H.C. Hockey Business Forum, including the visit at Frölunda Academy (insert). Sanny Lindström was the moderator.

■ ■ The event in Sweden’s biggest city was as good as one could hope for; two days of collecting knowledge and inspiration. Many of the participants of the second annual **EHC Hockey Business Forum** had already visited **Frölunda Indians Campus** the day before and the main event – the conference and the trade show - continued to prove the strength of an alliance in which people share information and learn from each other’s lessons.



Åsa Nathell, Frölunda

■ ■ The first half of the day focused on the financial side of things, with presentations by Frölunda’s **Åsa Nathell** and Storhamar’s **Njål Berge** as

well as sport economist **Dan Persson**. Both Nathell and Berge talked about the importance of knowing your audience. According to Nathell, Frölunda has about 27,000 customers – although she also acknowledged that hockey fans don’t like to be called customers – who buy, on average, only 2.2 tickets a season, and go to, on average, 1.5 games. A better conversion rate would make Frölunda a better business and attracting the “one-and-a-halves” would help.

■ ■ In Norway, **Njål Berge** helped Storhamar to increase their ticket sales by 318 percent in a few years, by focusing on not the ‘one-and-a-halves,’ but

■ ■ Storhamar identified three groups of fans: social fans, sports fans, and super fans. Using digital tools, they have been able to recruit new super fans, and convert some social fans into superfans, doubling their atten-



Dan Persson, Sports Economist

dance and quadrupling their season ticket sales. The smartphone has become the hub of entertainment for Storhamar's fans who get their news, their games, their interaction with the club, and their tickets on their phones.

"Ninety-five percent of our tickets are sold as digital tickers, on mobile. We didn't even build a website for that," Berge



Alpo Suhonen, legend

says. After the coffee break and networking with the trade show exhibitors, the forum changed gears and got closer to the ice again.

**Alpo Suhonen**, the first European NHL coach, opened his presentation with a video of opera singers, jazz musicians, and ballet dancers, mixed with clips from NHL and NBA games. "Don't think art and sports are different," he said. "You can learn a lot from theatre, of how to produce a play, for example."

"Try to open up your mind on performance culture because the players are acting on their own senses, own sensibilities, own bodies. Mick Jagger doesn't sing Sinatra," he said.

According to **Mike Helber**, TV analyst and former CEO of Linköping, hockey needs a strong CHL. "We had a meeting with Cloetta, our biggest sponsor, who was acquired



Njål Berge, Digital Analyst

by a venture capital firm. They asked us how we could help them promote their chocolate in Poland and Germany, and we didn't have an answer. That's why we need a European tournament that works," he said. But



Mike Zanier, ex-Oiler goalie

hockey also has untapped potential elsewhere, he said. The Olympics are an event that hockey must be at, for example.

"Hockey is a small sport. We need the Olympics to grow," said Helber who also would like to see an agreement that would keep young players in Europe

longer and would compensate the European clubs better.

■ ■ And since money is often tight, clubs have to be smart with it. One way, says **Mike Zanier**, former NHL goalie, is to not spend too much on a goalie. "Spend your money on a 'good enough' goalie and allocate the big bucks on positions that give team puck possession," he said.



Mike Helber, TV-analyst

After another member of the NHL goalie union, **Glenn Healy**, presented the business opportunities the NHL Alumni Association can provide, the afternoon was capped off by moderator **Sanny Lindström's** powerful speech on concussion. The topic is

close to his heart since concussions ended his career in 2013.

"It's your responsibility to make sure players get the help they need," said Lindström as he read the riot act to European club hockey executives.



Glenn Healy, NHL Alumni Association.

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