

# Enhancing Customer Relations in Team Sport Business

Marketing  
Master's thesis  
Henri Piipponen  
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## Abstract

Team sport has become driven by commercial drivers, and increasingly clubs operate as limited companies. In sport there are obviously other drivers than just pure economic success that are also present in the environment. However, it seems to be extremely difficult to operate profitably in team sport business. In general Finnish team sport businesses seem to underperform in business terms, and therefore the topic is particularly relevant. Indeed, relatively little academic research has been made in this field. This research is looking for insight in how consumer customer relations could be enhanced in team sport leading to more sustainable business operations.

## The research strategy

A literature review is included in the research, which pays attention particularly on three subjects. The characteristics of team sport products are discussed. This is followed by review of team sports' customers. Then special features of customer relations in a sport context are explored. Based on the review, a theoretical framework is constructed, which identifies five facets explaining different fans' motivation to attend games. Also central elements in fans' management are noticed. The framework is tested in a quantitative survey research. Based on survey results one strategy to classify fans is presented and elements explaining their attendance-motivations are discussed. The results provide views for customer relation enhancement in team sport context.

## Implications

The study identifies features which particularly explain the behavior of specific fan classes, and considers how their relations could be enhanced. In the end, the research suggests that building strong club identity and inclusive strategies are central in the enhancement of team sport customer relations.

## Key terms

Sport marketing, Team Sport, Team sport business, Customer relations

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## 1. Introduction

Team sport has become increasingly more commercial in the last couple of decades. Today commercial drivers in the industry are obvious. Sponsorship, endorsement, broadcasting rights and other commercial features are generating revenues for sport organizations. In addition, these elements have driven a significant financial growth. Deals between sport organizations and representatives of other businesses are made for huge sums. For example the English Premier League's three years TV rights were sold for almost £1.8 billion (Independent, 2009) and sponsorship deals generate tens of millions for biggest clubs (blog.sport.co.uk, 2010). Naturally the growing numbers have boosted player salaries, and the best athletes are millionaires (Forbes, 2009). For example the average salary of NHL players has grown from \$225.000 in 1991 to \$2.4 million in 2010 (Forbes, 2010) (Suite101, 2010).

Those presented numbers are of course examples from world's leading sport leagues. The financial numbers in Finnish team sport business are obviously on completely different level. Naturally, the relatively small Finnish sport market can't compete with larger countries and world's leading leagues, but the commercial trend is still obvious here. Ice hockey is well developed and football is showing similar features. However, the Finnish team sport industry is following behind compared to other close Nordic countries. Finnish sport organizations seem to underperform in business terms. More business-expertise is needed in the industry.

This thesis discusses the team sport business and customer relation enhancement on the field. It takes a look at the sport product, which is consumed by game-attending fans, and provides a brief review of sport business' development. The research describes who the customer is in sport business. Also, it identifies customer relations between fans and sport organizations, and studies their enhancement. A theoretical framework for the enhancement of customer relations in the team sport business is presented and tested with a field survey. In the end, the thesis provides conclusions. The research contributes to yet quite underdeveloped Finnish sport business research by providing views for better customer relation management.

## 1.1. Background

During the past couple decades we've seen how the top levels of most popular Finnish sports have become commercialized. Business' presence in sport is very apparent as the teams in these leagues operate as companies and balance with their costs and revenues. Unlike the previous situation of a couple decades ago, the players in Finnish ice hockey and football leagues are mostly professionals. This is more obvious in ice hockey, which has achieved a strong position and generally players are quite well paid in the top league SM-liiga. However, the SM-liiga constantly loses players to foreign leagues, which can provide higher wages. It is obvious that the SM-liiga can't compete in financial terms with such leagues as the North American NHL or the newcomer Russian KHL. But if we compare SM-liiga to our neighbor country Sweden's top league Elitserien, it shows pretty dramatic differences. The attendance figures are quite close between these leagues. Elitserien reaches 6160 (swehockey.se, 2011) and SM-liiga 4850 (sm-liiga.fi, 2011) average in attendance. However average Elitserien team's turnover €12 m (aftenbladet.se, 2009) is about double compared to SM-liiga team's average €5.8 m (kauppalehti.fi, 2010).

The situation in the Finnish Football league Veikkausliiga is even worse. The average turnover of a club is around €1 m (Helsingin Sanomat, 2010). Comparing this number to Swedish Allsvenskan shows that the average turnover there is €8.1m (Sahlström, 2009) and that is quite revealing. Also, the figures of Norwegian and Danish clubs are around the same level or even higher than in Sweden. As one can expect from the financial numbers, attendance figures show obvious differences: Finland 2217; Sweden 6513; Norway 8072; Denmark 6771 (worldfootball.net, 2011). Additionally, second level football leagues in other Nordic countries are far ahead Finland.

Sport is no doubt an industry, which is driven also by other objectives than profit making. However, with only one exception, football club and registered association MYPA, all clubs are operating as limited companies in the Finnish football and ice hockey leagues. At least in theory limited companies should generate profits or value for their owners, which seems to be almost impossible in Finnish team sport business. Only one Veikkausliiga club generated profits during last financial year (Helsingin Sanomat, 2010). It's going better for the SM-liiga, which achieved exceptionally good results last season if compared to previous years. Only 6 out of 14 made losses during the last period, but the combined result was still negative (kauppalehti.fi, 2010). The financial problems are not just a Finnish characteristic; they seem to be a typical feature of team

sport in general. Still, they are very apparent here. Only few sport organizations have been profitable financially for longer periods. Recently the financial stability of Finnish football clubs has been especially in headlines. The Veikkausliiga club AC Oulu was not given a license to participate for the upcoming season due to not being able to meet financial conditions required (Iltasanomat, 2011). According to current information other another club Tampere United will be banned from all competitions, because accepting investment from an untrustworthy foreign party (Helsingin Sanomat, 2011). Only few Veikkausliiga clubs have managed to operate profitably. The losses of are truly significant when compared to these clubs' turnover. (Helsingin Sanomat, 2010).

For a long time, most of the clubs have made negative results. Are people willing to invest money into unprofitable business and support the teams' existence, which often seems to happen? We can read how Finnish team sport companies are trying to gather more capital by share issues or otherwise some financial support after unsuccessful periods, but have they ever shared dividends for their owners? Such trend can't be sustainable in the long run. The Finnish team sport business has an obvious demand for more business expertise. The industry seems to have a lot capacity for growth. More attention must be paid to business management in order to achieve this potential.

## 1.2. Focus, previous research and objects

What are sport products and their usage? No absolute answer exists. It has been suggested that sport products have three categories, which are spectator sport, participation sport and category including sporting goods, apparel, athletic shoes and other sports-related products (Fullerton & Merz, 2008). One explanation regarding sport products' consumption presents that it "entails many types of involvement with sport, including playing, officiating, watching, listening, reading, and collecting" (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007). More specifically regarding team sport, four distinct groups have been viewed as buying customers for team sport product (Mason, 1999):

1. The fans
2. Television and other media
3. Communities that construct facilities and support local clubs
4. Corporations that interact with the leagues and teams

This study focuses on team sport products and on fans, who consume the product by attending games. This consumer group can be regarded as the most essential in the business of team sport.

Popularity of the product attracts other customer segments. Without fans there would be no demand to show games on TV and pay for those rights. Indeed, without game-attending fans clubs would have problems attracting sponsors (Gladden, Irwin & Sutton, 2001). The initial driver for a sport organization's growth is the development of a fan-base. Individual fans are extremely important for sport organizations.

Academic team sport business research is a quite young and small discipline (Késenne, 2007). However, sport business research has been growing recently (Késenne, 2007) (Robinson & Trail, 2005). Currently such publications as *Sport Marketing Quarterly* and *Journal of Sport Management* provide sport-related research. Also research on other academic fields like psychology, sociology and communication has been interested in studying sport (Quick, 2000). The majority of the sport business research has been dominated by a North American domain. European research is following behind, although professional sport is becoming constantly more business driven everywhere (Bauer, Sauer & Schmitt, 2005) (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008) (Alexandris & Theodorakis, 2008). Often the sport industry's research focuses on the world's leading sport leagues. In North American research the four major leagues there NBA, NFL, MLB and NHL are often under scope. In turn, European research mostly pays attention to the continent's biggest football leagues.

Quite many studies have been conducted concerning the variables impacting an individual's decision to attend sports events (DeSchrive & Robinson, 2003), but only some studies provide ideas for enhancing customer relations in the long run. Indeed, the marketing discipline has a long way to go in sport clubs (Adamson, Jones & Tapp, 2006). Particularly the status of Finnish sport business science is alarming. A growing number of athletes and clubs operate on a professional basis, but only a few if any courses relating to sport management are provided in Finnish business schools. Indeed, only very little sport business research has been carried out. As the industry continues to grow a lot more research will be needed.

Quite naturally the impact of team's on-field performance to fans' satisfaction and behavior has been acknowledged in the literature (James & Yoshida, 2010) (Anderson, Fink & Trail, 2003) (Beaton et al., 2009) (McDonald & Sherry, 2010) (Daniel, Quick & Van Leeuwen, 2002) (Mason, 1999). Sport marketers can have only a limited impact on this core product. Although on-field performance will be noted as a central feature of a team-sport product, this study will put more

emphasis on features, which are under marketers' control. This study won't discuss the management of the actual sport team and players. Also business customer relations are not particularly studied. Only little attention is paid to such issues as b2b-partnerships, sponsorships, etc.

Previous sport marketing research has tried to classify game-attending fans and explain their characteristics (Quick, 2000) (Tapp, 2004). The motivation for game-attendance and the construction of sport event satisfaction have also been regular topics in the discussion (James & Yoshida, 2010) (Beaton et al., 2009) (Daniel, Quick & Van Leeuwen, 2002) (Greenwell, Mahony & Park, 2010). This study combines these two directions and identifies central game-attendance drivers among specific fan classes. Additionally, only few studies have focused on consumer customer relations and their enhancement in a sport context. Guidelines for enhancing customer relations among fans will be provided.

Main stream team sport business research has focused on the world's biggest leagues. This study contributes especially to small or medium sized sport businesses and to the still quite undeveloped Finnish sport marketing research. Sport products can be used in various forms, but this study concentrates on spectator sport and particularly to the marketing of team sport events for game-attending customers. This first introduction is followed by a theoretical review consisting of three sections. The second section pays attention to the characteristics and development of team sport industry. The third section identifies key features in the buyer of a team sport product. Fourth section takes into consideration their management. In fifth section the construction of study's theoretical framework is presented. The theoretical discussion is the basis for field survey (sixth section), which provides answers for following central research questions:

- *How to classify sport fans based on their characteristics?*
- *What features explain fans' game-attendance?*
- *Which elements are central in developing customer relations with different fans?*

The findings of theoretical review and field survey are concluded in final, seventh section providing managerial implications for following topic:

- *How to enhance customer relations and business in team sport?*

## 2. Team sport products and business

What is actually the product sold at game-events? This section discusses of which features team sport product consists of and how different parties have impact on the products' final format. Indeed, a short review of the team sport industry's elements and development will be provided. This section is particularly relevant for the study, because it gives an understanding of the features and conditions under which team sport products are provided for customers.

### 2.1. Team sport products' characteristics

In the literature of sport many features have been identified to be a part of sport products. Perhaps the most discussed is the inconsistency of sport. Every game has its unique features. The outcome of a game, even if same teams would play again, is uncertain (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007) (McDonald M. A., 1996) (Mason, 1999) (Tapp, 2004) (Késenne, 2007) (Alaja, 2000, p. 28). The "core" game is only one element. The experience of sport product includes also venue atmosphere, the apparel, the music, etc, and the product is extended beyond the game (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007). Indeed, it is generally recognized that marketers have little control over the core products. Therefore their efforts focus on product extensions beyond the game itself (Alaja, 2000, s. 29) (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007, p. 149).

Several clubs are participating in leagues and supplying the team sport product. In order to guarantee the product's quality cooperation and regulation is needed. Who can be in the market, and under what terms? Another restriction is that clubs can't freely choose their locations and markets. Clubs may only move if they are given permission from the league or sport's national head organization (Késenne, 2007, s. 9). In North America it is more common that clubs move to another cities, as they operate almost purely as business organizations. Such cases are typically related to club acquisitions in which new owners want to relocate the club. In Europe it's very uncommon that club would move to another city.

Sport is classified as a service which is surrounded by additional goods and services (McDonald M., 1996). Also other researchers have classified spectator sport as a service (Daniel, Quick & Van Leeuwen, 2002) (Fink, Greenwell & Pastore, 2002). Although some previous literature has regarded professional sport as service, this study uses term product. Attending a sport event is entertainment, and it often includes tangibles such as food/drinks, a ticket stub, a program,

memorabilia and merchandise (McDonald M., 1996). Sport products are produced and consumed simultaneously, and consumers actually participate in the production (Alaja, 2000, p. 28).

Team sport events take place at a certain time at facilities designed for sport competition. The atmosphere in sport events has been defined as “preferential affective state that spectators attribute to the idiosyncratic environmental features of a sport stadium” (Benkenstein & Ulrich, 2010). High emotional involvement and commitment from fans are typical characteristic of sport (McDonald M., 1996, p. 53). Consumption of sport product is often social event which gathers people together, but the experience is always perceived individually by each consumer (Alaja, 2000, p. 28).

Sport products have developed and changed during years. For instance changes in rules have been made, which have been reasoned typically by producing faster, more entertaining and spectator-friendly games (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007). Such changes have occurred in basketball, in which an offensive game is enforced with time limits. For example shooting attempts have to be made in specific time period. In recent years ice hockey has also presented some renewals, like the usage of penalty shootouts if regular games end as ties. So the core product can be modified to some degree. But typically such changes are driven by international head organizations, and individual clubs have very little if no authority in these decisions.

## 2.2. The production of team sport

The individual club is only one creator of the final team sport's final form. Team sport products are created in games, which are part of certain competitions like leagues. Every team sport competition has one common characteristic. It's ultimately a search for a winner. Otherwise there might be differences in almost every aspect between leagues. Differences exist in the length and time-period of the season, number of teams, game schedule, and competition format. Each of these might be organized in league-specific ways. This chapter discusses elements, which have an impact to the production, and it also highlights differences in competition formats.

European and North American professional team sport industries have significant differences. The European team sport market is largely dominated by football (Dietl & Hasan, 2007). Finland is actually quite an exceptional country as ice hockey is clearly the most popular sport. Also in North America football's position is relatively weak compared to other sports. Four major professional

leagues receive most attention In US (DeSchrive & Robinson, 2003). These leagues are National Football League (NFL, American football), National Basketball Association (NBA), Major League Baseball (MLB) and National Hockey League (NHL).

The four major North-American leagues have grown financially and in size during the last 20 years. They receive wide media exposure and even international television contracts. Behind those major leagues minor league professional sport has also developed on that continent. Now several lower level professional leagues exist with hundreds of teams reaching increased number of spectators. Typically minor league teams have lower attendance, gather fans from close areas and pay lower salaries. (DeSchrive & Robinson, 2003). Comparing Finnish professional team sport leagues to North American minor leagues can be regarded reasonable. The attendance and salary levels are quite comparable between them. Naturally more sports are played from professional-basis in US than in Finland, which is quite obvious considering the size difference between these two countries. If ice hockey and football are not included, there are only few professional team sport athletes in Finland.

Teams might compete in varying forms. Clear differences exist for example in the number of teams. Indeed, the ways to determine the champion of the league alter. European and North American competition systems have generally quite obvious differences.

In national European Football Leagues the number of teams varies between 10-20 (Késenne, 2009). Typically each team plays an equal amount of matches against other teams at home and away. In most leagues this means one home and one away game against each opponent per season (Késenne, 2009). Ultimately the champion has collected the most points. Some other European leagues, for example in ice hockey, determine champions in knock out / playoff formats (Dietl & Hasan, 2007). In these teams compete in regular season to qualify and to get home advantage for playoffs games. The game schedules on regular season can vary significantly. Indeed, in most of the European professional sport leagues the worst-ranked teams in league(s) relegate for next season (Késenne, 2007, p. 8) or might have to play additional qualifying matches. In turn couple best teams in lower leagues might promote to higher levels for next competitive season (Késenne, 2009). It is speculated that due to the fear of relegation and the ambition to promote clubs have additional pressure for player-spending (Gracia-del-Barrio & Szymanski, 2009) (Késenne, 2007, p. 9). European clubs compete in multinational competitions like the UEFA

Champions League (Dietl & Hasan, 2007). The places for these competitions are shared for the best teams in national leagues. Spots are given to countries whose teams have performed stronger in previous years, and teams from weaker leagues have to pass qualifications to get access. Typical in European football is also that national cup competitions are played besides leagues.

In North America the league formats and game schedules might be pretty complex. For example NHL consisting of 30 teams is divided into two conferences. Additionally each conference includes three divisions. Each division has five teams. Most games are played against teams in same divisions, and least games against other conference's teams. Various other examples of unique game scheduling exist also. Indeed, North American teams play relatively many games in season. NHL and NBA have a regular season of 82 games and MLB even more. Exception is NFL with a regular season of only 16 games. After regular season playoff-systems are basically always used as a climax for the season. Most US professional leagues operate as closed entities. The leagues are closed and no promotion / relegation systems exist (Késenne, 2007, p. 8). Additionally the player markets are different in US, where young players' rights are drafted by teams (Késenne, 2007). The weakest teams in leagues typically are given the first draft-picks, which at least hypothetically should balance the competitiveness among league teams. Additionally salary caps might be used. In such cases team's total player salaries can't exceed this cap. A salary cap is often reasoned by securing a reasonable profit rate (Késenne, 2007, p. 125) or the competitiveness of each team in the league. Leagues are managed by a common agreement in the closed US major leagues. Methods such as salary caps and revenue sharing are used to regulate competition and financial fluctuation. (Gracia-del-Barrio & Szymanski, 2009) (Dietl & Lang, 2008).

Based on previous research by Roger Noll (2003), Smith & Westerbeek (2004) presented a classification sport competitions' dimensions. Noll had previously identified five to which Smith & Westerbeek (2004) added five more dimensions resulting in a total number of ten. They presented following list (p. 53-67) of the structural choices faced by leagues / competitions:

1. Format: the method for scheduling games / tournaments to determine the champion
2. Hierarchy: the relationships between lower and higher leagues / competitions
3. Multiplicity: the number of leagues / competitions at the same level of hierarchy
4. Membership: the conditions under which a team or athlete can enter and exit
5. Government: the methods for deciding and enforcing rules, policies, ownership and legal structure
6. Labor: the methods employed to enhance competitive balance and outcome uncertainty by manipulating the labor market
7. Finance: the methods employed to manipulate the financial dividends of the league / competition
8. Distribution: the methods of distributing and timing the game to markets
9. Integration: decisions concerning activity horizontally and vertically in the value chain
10. Professionalism: the nature and level of compensation to players and managers

List 1: Dimensions in sport competitions (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004)

Decisions regarding these dimensions are made by the league organizations, the clubs collectively or by individual clubs. Typically clubs compete in federation-driven leagues, which are responsible for general administration. In some cases a sub-organization has been distinguished to organize the competition in the top league. If such head- and sub-organizations exist, their bonds are typically really close. Usually clubs are at least on some level taking part in the decision making in the presented dimensions even if the final decisions would be made by the league organization. Competition is usually managed by certain sport art's head organization consisting of active member associations, in other words sport clubs (Sarhimaa, 2000). Regarding the multiplicity in US there have been cases in the 60s and 70s when more than one major league / competition have been played simultaneously. In such cases leagues have merged after some time (Késenne, 2007). At one point NFL and AFL competed in American football. Other example is ABA and NBA from basketball. Labor market is very seldom manipulated in European sport leagues. Teams can in theory spend however much they want on players and don't have to draft players' rights. According to Bosman verdict of 1995 player market is now liberalized and players are free to move to other clubs if they have no valid contracts (Késenne, 2007, p. 84) (Késenne, 2010). "Teams compete to hire players, and players sell their services in a market". Players may switch teams within contract, but in such cases the move typically entails a transfer fee. Alternatively players

may sign to new clubs as free agents if previous contract has expired. (Gracia-del-Barrio & Szymanski, 2009). Indeed, in Europe there are typically no salary caps or draft-systems familiar from US by which leagues' competitive balance are managed. Such manipulation has been defended by stating that a free player market is giving competitive advantage for large cities' teams and leads to unbalance in league (Késenne, 2007, p. 3).

Regarding the governance of the leagues there are differences in how close relations leagues and the governing bodies of certain sport have. For example in US both the big four leagues and the college systems are independent. European systems are more club-based, and the clubs are usually also responsible for non-elite development of sport or at least have formal relationships to the head organizations. Two legal structures are employed in governing sport competitions. In joint ventures independent clubs form a joint venture in which clubs' representatives operate as the directors of the league. In the case of a single entity the league owns teams or allows shares of the league to be sold or appoints management for each team. (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004, p. 58). Finnish leagues are typically managed as joint ventures and the clubs cooperate with head organizations as well as with non-elite development of sport. The most visible form is probably providing leisure time sport activities for people of all ages.

### 2.3. Team sport business and its development

Sport has transformed from a leisure time activity to a business, and it has become one way to earn a living. Athletic competition has always been followed by public, but in recent decades the link between high-level sport and commerce has become more obvious. In general sport, leisure, recreation and entertainment industry is economically world's third largest legal industry (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 47). However, in relation to team sport public discussion is often missing the fact that sport is business as well (Jucevicius & Karpavicius, 2009). Many people are extremely interested in sport, but its business terms are discussed relatively seldom. Sport's commercialization might be defined by that sport is regarded as product with commercial value (Sarhimaa, 2000, p. 37). This chapter discusses team sport business' evolvement and current status. Concerns regarding profitability in the business are also taken into consideration.

### 2.3.1. The business in team sport

European sport organizations started to be organized in late 19<sup>th</sup> century as ideological associations. Even today that's the most common form in sport environment. (Sarhimaa, 2000). In recent decades high-level sport has evolved to be business instead of providing activities for public good. However, on professional level it's increasingly more common that sport organizations operate as companies and in some countries it's actually mandatory if certain conditions are met (Sarhimaa, 2000, p. 33). Besides aiming for profits sport organizations are in some cases managed nonprofit basis balancing with the needs of different stakeholder groups (McDonald & Sherry, 2010). However, in England clubs started turning from member associations to limited liability companies already in 1880s (Szymanski, 2010). The driver for this movement was the chance to invest, build new and generate greater revenues.

Unlike perhaps still in the 1980s, team sport companies don't anymore rely just on ticket revenues from gates (Dietl & Hasan, 2007). Besides live games sport is currently very popular in the media and especially as a TV product (Késenne, 2007, p. 19) (Sarhimaa, 2000, p. 37). The sales of broadcasting or player rights are not the focus in this study, but some numbers are presented here. They provide insight to team sport's commercial value, financial development and growth of business. Starting with world's leading football league, the English Premier League. Its TV contract has boomed recently. In 1988 a contract for four years was worth £47 million. In 2004 a contract for three years was worth over £1 billion. (Lonsdale, 2004). More recently the price for three year's period starting from 2010 reached almost £1.8 billion (Independent, 2009). Also other leading European football leagues receive huge sums annually: Italian Serie A €488m, German Bundesliga €250m and French Ligue 1 €600m. The biggest league in terms of broadcasting revenues is American Football league NFL, which for example received during period 1998-2005 annually \$2.2 billion. (Dietl & Hasan, 2007). In football the price for World cup's TV rights has also increased significantly. \$80m in 1998 has changed to \$890m in 2006 (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 91).

Besides TV rights huge sums are moved in player transfers. In 1996 football's world record transfer fee was paid when Newcastle United acquired Alan Shearer from Blackburn Rovers for £15m. In 2009 Manchester United sold Cristiano Ronaldo for £80m to Real Madrid. Obviously these numbers are just top examples, and such sums are moving only in few leagues worldwide.

Evidence from European football suggests that if clubs are located in wealthy regions, they are typically more competitive (Mourão, 2010).

Still sport business has evolved in general. Exploitation for money has always been present in sport (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 2), but in last decades sport industry's commercial growth has speeded up and increasingly more clubs operate as businesses employing professional athletes (Anderson, Fink & Trail, 2003) (Bauer, Sauer & Schmitt, 2005) (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008) (Adamson, Jones & Tapp, 2006) (Sarhimaa, 2000).

An example is Finland, where professional team sport business is relatively new and small. More often team sport is organized as business and sport generates the main living for the players, coaches, assistants and other staff (Sarhimaa, 2000). In 1980s most players in SM-liiga and Veikkausliiga (prior to 1990 SM-sarja) were amateurs. The current situation is different and almost all the players are professional with only a few exceptions. But if the business situations of these two sports are compared, ice hockey is performing clearly better.

Business-driven practices have allowed sport to respond better to customers' needs and to reach more fans (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 11). Sport has turned in to be entertainment (Alaja, 2000, p. 27) and economic success is becoming a more central element in sport (Jucevicius & Karpavicius, 2009). The sport industry has also become increasingly more customer-oriented. Game facilities (Fink, Greenwell & Pastore, 2002) and other service-extensions have evolved (Greenwell, Lee & Naeger, 2007). Ticket prices have increased significantly in recent decades, and individual fans may not be able to afford tickets (Kim & Trail, 2011) and corporations are more often ticket-buyers (Crompton & Howard, 2004). Indeed, technological development improves sport's availability (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 11). Following a certain team/league or finding out information of specific sport is constantly easier. Sport has great spectator appeal, which gives sport a chance to gain revenues from many sources like ticket sales, television rights, sponsorships, licensing, etc. (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 89). The representatives of all different interest groups are naturally customers from sport organization's perspective (Mason, 1999). As several revenue sources exist, sport can employ business professionals who further develop commercial opportunities (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 90). The most important target market for all team sport organizations is still game-attending fans. Due to people's willingness to follow

sport performances on site leads to that other customers (sponsors, media, etc.) consider sport products as interesting investment targets (Késenne, 2007, p. 14).

The production of team sport products is impacted by different actors in the industry. One conceptualization of the elements is provided by Jucevicius & Karpavicius (2009), who identified the micro-environment of football business from a football club's or a league's perspective. Although they concentrated on football the elements are comparable in other sports. The environment where clubs operate is really similar regardless of which sport is in question. Next their model is presented. This is followed by brief discussion, which suggests how the model would be even more suitable for the team sport business in general.

The First element is *suppliers*. The suppliers in this environment are players. Their interest to play and their skills influence the success and the profitability of a club or league. Sport schools are also regarded as a supplier, because they develop professional players. The second element is *customers*. Spectators and fans are the users of the sport product that is made in sport business. Football players are also taken into account in this element as they are viewed as users of the product. Additionally, the authors noted that amateur players have customer-role, because they sponsor their own playing. Third element is the *infrastructure*. It consists of the services that guarantee the match performance such as sport arena and its supplements. Also, the administrative organization taking care of the whole business system's functioning is taken into account. The fourth element is *competitors*, which pays attention to two features. First, there is competition between other sport clubs that participate in the same league. The authors argue that there is permanent competition of the spectators in order to increase club's income as much as possible. The other feature is competition against other sport arts and even other leisure time activities. The fifth element in the microenvironment of sport business is *groups of interests*. According to the authors the interests of different stakeholder groups must be taken into consideration.

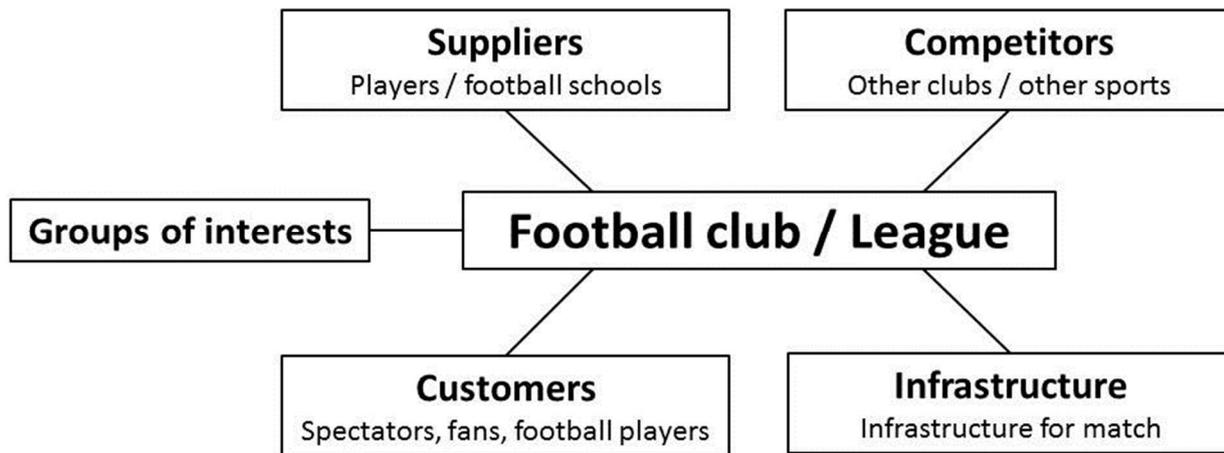


Figure 1: Original micro-environment elements of football business (Jucevicius & Karpavicius, 2009)

The authors focused on football business. Regarding sport business in general the model still has some limitations.

Concerning supplier element the development of junior players is often country specific. Besides specific schools, junior football clubs or junior sections of clubs might develop new talents, which is relevant to acknowledge. Coaches were also absent. Their efforts have central impact on performance. In customer element players can't be regarded as customers. The professional players are already viewed as supplier of the product. Of course they probably enjoy playing the game and "using" the product, but in the end players are paid to play for a particular team and club, who produce and sells team sport products. In addition business customers have essential role in team sport business today. With competitors there are couple issues to consider. One characteristic of team sport customer is exceptional loyalty within sport. Often they don't even consider visiting games in which their team is not playing. To develop the quality of the whole league product, clubs should operate as partners with common goals. The role of "groups of interests" as a distinct element is also quite interesting. The basic assumption in all viable business operation is the capability to consider varying stakeholder groups and their interests in micro- and macro-environment. This element's existence is little irrelevant.

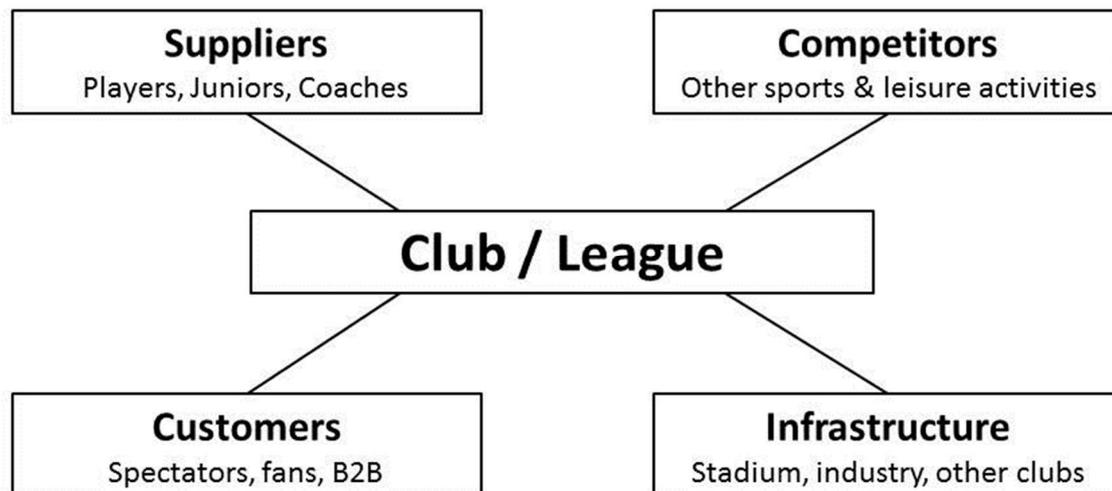


Figure 2: Modified micro-environment of team sport business

Based on previous discussion some modifications in the model are appropriate, and modified version is presented. It gives more comprehensive picture of elements' in team sport business generally.

### 2.3.2. Profitability concerns

"The business of football seems relatively easy to understand: performance generates revenue, and wages generate costs. Beyond these two relationships, there is relatively little scope for clubs or managers to influence outcomes" (Gracia-del-Barrio & Szymanski, 2009). This is quite narrow viewpoint. In the end, on-field success will not last forever and, for sure, every team faces difficult periods. Therefore it is risky, if clubs' business and marketing operations rely purely on success. One of the typical symptoms in sport marketing is the belief that winning is the key for increased sales (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007, p. 12). "No club (team) can improve its position in the standing without worsening the position of other teams" (Dietl, Egon & Lang, 2008). Basically if league consists of 10 teams the average position of a team is always 5.5. Not even league's biggest payroll guarantees success (Gracia-del-Barrio & Szymanski, 2009) (Dietl, Egon & Lang, 2008). This is one of the most obvious facts in team sport's history. Still, clubs tend to overinvest in players, which often lead to dissipation of league's revenue. (Dietl, Egon & Lang, 2008). Indeed, as already presented one, of the fundamental elements in sport is its inconsistency. In long term other features than success are relevant for increasing sales and developing customer relations. In sport context strong brand equity is particularly important. Additionally, the impact of non-product-

related brand attributes such as club logo, colors, stadium, culture and values might be triple than the impact of product-related brand attributes like success and star players. Sport clubs' most important asset is their fans' attachment. (Bauer, Sauer & Schmitt, 2005) (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). Only one team can become a champion in a league each year. Instead of focusing on winning, sport management evolves to realize the long-term value in organization (Gladden, Irwin & Sutton, 2001). Fan bases in sport are extremely loyal, and clubs should consider those options how to transfer that loyalty into improved financial balance (Szymanski, 2010).

Ticket sales are naturally essential for sport organizations. They typically cover 20-50% of revenues. Teams' primary offering is the sporting event. In German Bundesliga 1999/2000 clubs' main revenue sources were media rights with share of 31,5 %, stadium visits 25,4 %, sponsorships 24,2 % and merchandising 7 % (Bauer, Sauer & Schmitt, 2005). Team sport business has managed to grow its income levels. For example on period 1994-2004 the revenues in top Spanish and English leagues significantly increased. In 1994 the average revenue for an English premier league club was bit less than €20 million. In 2004 the figure was around five times higher. Broadcasting rights has been the main driver for this development. During this research period the share of total revenues spent on players were quite stable, Spanish league averaged at 62% and English premier league at 53%. Perhaps more interesting number was in Spanish second highest level. In average 93% of revenues were spent on players. (Gracia-del-Barrio & Szymanski, 2009). Also in Italy player costs have been as high as 125% of clubs' turnover (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 16). How come the clubs even operate profitably if so much is put on players' salaries?

Too often professional team sport organizations struggle with their financial balance. As shown in previous numbers, sport organizations' revenues have increased but the costs have gone up too (Kim & Trail, 2011). Many European soccer clubs fight against debts. Revenues are too small compared to operating costs. Clubs' financial stability has been problematic for example in Belgian (Késenne, 2010) and in English (Szymanski, 2010) football. In England new broadcasting contract created for the 92 teams in league system collectively a revenue growth of 13%, but only 20 clubs managed to operate profitably. In good business practice some of the money would be invested in clubs' future, but the majority of clubs spent wildly on players' wages and transfer fees. The situation in England was still quite reasonable compared to other leagues in Europe who were doing even worse. (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004, p. 99).

Problems in managing clubs' finance are evident. In 1990s most North American clubs saw a significant growth in the values of their organizations, but couldn't turn this to increased operating profits (Gladden, Irwin & Sutton, 2001). The trend seems to be quite similar elsewhere. Clubs are valued financially higher and bigger sums are traded in sport business, but operating profitably is quite exceptional.

Sport business is often regarded as unstable. However, Szymanski (2010) provided alternative views. He studied English football and presented that compared to other industries it's clearly one of the most sustainable businesses. Of the 88 clubs who played in the English league system in 1923 85 still existed in 2007. Indeed, 75 of those teams still played in the top four levels. In other businesses such strong stability would be really exceptional.

The author pointed out various aspects why football clubs are flexible compared to challenges in traditional businesses. First of all, clubs can adjust quite easily to lower incomes and they can survive on lower levels. Even if the product (team) is weak, some customers remain loyal. If lower quality players are hired and paid lower wages, clubs can still survive. Hiring unskilled employees to produce lower quality products would not be accepted elsewhere. Then, clubs have often deep geographical roots, which never disappear completely. The communal attachment towards teams is rare in other business areas, and it provides unique flexibility for clubs. One point is that the "technology" in football never becomes out-of-date. Technological advances have changed and evolved many businesses, but the nature of football game has basically always been same. Indeed, low cost rivals can't enter the market and offer lower price. Actually the rules protect domestic clubs as foreign competitors can't enter that particular market. Clubs can also overinvest, but they basically never disappear. Only the investors might lose their wealth. The existence of clubs is almost always secured. Sport organization face bankruptcies extremely seldom. (Szymanski, 2010).

Sport organizations often seem to be unreachable for economic forces present elsewhere (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004, p. 123). Smith & Westerbeek (2004, p. 122-123) state that there are various examples of football clubs in Europe and Australia, in which clubs would have faced bankruptcies if they had been any other than sport organizations. They also continue stating that in such cases community funds have been used to keep up clubs because of their vital role for local communities (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004). Clubs are subsidized by governments or by other authorities for example in Spain (Barajas & Rodriguez, 2010) and in Belgium (Késenne, 2010). The

imbalance between income and expenses is a typical problem in team sport business (Barajas & Rodriguez, 2010). Based on various examples internationally it's quite easy to support Smith & Westerbeek's (2004, p. 123) statement that sport organizations are often run in a way based on emotional support and attractiveness as much as they are run on the basis of business principles.

Williams (2007) has studied sport fandom by exploring European and more specifically English football teams. He noticed that smaller professional clubs in England favor a "community" approach and urge for local popularity. (Williams, 2007). Quite naturally, clubs located on areas with high population are more likely to perform well on- and off-field (Mourão, 2010). The size of the market surrounding club's home has a significant impact on crowd size (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 67). Clubs operate and compete in different markets, but profitability concerns seem to be present almost everywhere in team sport business.

To summarize this chapter the most important points are reviewed. Team sport business is often featured with profitability concerns. Clubs tend to overinvest in their efforts to achieve athletic success, but unfortunately results vary. There can be only one winner in each season. Although clubs often struggle with finance, their existence is still secure relative to other businesses. With the help of loyal fans and deep communal roots clubs still somehow survive if difficulties are faced. Investors might lose money, but clubs almost never disappear. In long term other features are more relevant than success in creating sustainable business and customer relations.

### 3. Professional team sport customers

Sport clubs' most valuable asset is their fans (Kim & Trail, 2011) and next they are discussed more in detail. The interest showed by sport fans is undoubtedly the most important reason why professional sport has evolved to its current status. Although sport organizations gather now income from various sources, game-attending fans have traditionally provided the key income for clubs (Dietl & Hasan, 2007) and their attachment is the reason why other parties like sponsors are willing to invest in team sport (Késenne, 2007, p. 14).

Understanding this essential customer group should be one of the top priorities in team sport organizations. What are these customers' characteristics and their motives to buy sport products? This section discusses who are the customers in team sport and is divided into three sub-sections. First, attention will be paid on their characteristics. Second, couple models which have classified sport customers in groups are presented. Finally, some viewpoints explaining sport customers' motivation to attend are reviewed. The argumentation here presents several central ideas in this study. Many of these aspects are used later in relation to study's theoretical framework and the findings of the later field survey.

#### 3.1. Customers' characteristics

As customers in other businesses too, sport customers may have varying interests, motivations and reasons to attend games. Fans can be studied based on their behavior and based on their degree of attachment to a team (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). Sports consumers are typically highly involved (Bee & Kahle, 2006). They often follow sport closely. Still their behavior might be driven by different features in team sport products, which they especially regard interesting. Spectators' motives to attend might base on such issues as eustress, group affiliation, self-esteem, entertainment, etc. The motives typically differ by gender, sport and preferences. Also the points of attachment show differences as spectators might be attached to different aspects like teams, clubs, athletes and other fans. (Kim & Trail, 2010). Some enjoy a variety of aspects in game experiences and for some others a particular club has a great importance (Tapp, 2004).

Sport teams bring together people with varying socio-economic backgrounds, who share a bond – an attachment to the team (Roy, 2008). Many fans appreciate that sport provides them an escape

from everyday life (Adamson, Jones & Tapp, 2006). In general men are attending sport events more likely than women (Beaton et al., 2009), but for sure there are differences between sports. Sport and fandom have been even compared to religion. They both elicit feelings amongst followers, and the heart of an optimal religious and sporting experiment is spiritual enlightenment (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004, p. 90). Sport and religion have both awakened passionate and even violent behavior in people.

It is argued that fan behavior is most intense when fans believe that the team represents their values and when the actors in sport organization are viewed as trustworthy and credible. Organizations should aim to match the values of the club with the values of target consumers. (Bee & Kahle, 2006). German examples of value-related clubs are FC Schalke 04, regarded as working class club, and elitist Bayern Munich (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). As previously noted, fans might value the benefits of non-product-related attributes three times higher than product-related benefits. So such attributes like club culture, identity and other fans are more essential in the sport fandom than attributes like team, success and head coach. (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). Fandom is about expressing identity, and success is less important feature (Groepel-Klein, Koenigstorfer & Schmitt, 2010).

Loyalty, defined as "a feeling or an attitude of devoted attachment or affection" (Rundle-Thiele, 2006), has a significant role in sport environment. Sport consumers are highly loyal to their favorite teams (Brownlee et al., 2008) (O'Dwyer & Richardson, 2003). Fans start to support their favorite teams already at young age. Usually they have picked their teams when they are less than ten years old. Additionally 70% of them stick loyal to one club. Even if someone changes favorite team, it is done in childhood and then he/she sticks loyal to one. (O'Dwyer & Richardson, 2003). Another survey, carried out among fans of a rugby club, revealed that only 3.2% of the respondents were fans for first season and almost 70% had been fans for eight years or more (Dale et al., 2005). Loyalty levels in sport are much stronger compared to conventional industries (Adamson, Jones & Tapp, 2006). Loyalty does not always turn to behavior. Attitudinal loyalty is still regarded very important in the sport context (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). Kim & Trail (2010) found also support to loyalty's centrality in attendance. They studied constraints and motivators affecting attendance finding two relatively important factors. An internal motivator, attachment to the team explained 21% of variance. Then an internal constraint, lack of success placed second and explained 10%. (Kim & Trail, 2010).

One perspective to understand individual's involvement with sport team is provided by Funk et al. (2004) who tried to explain interest, motivation and arousal related to it. They created Team Sport Involvement Model (TSI) in which four underlying facets were identified. These were attraction, self-expression, centrality to lifestyle and risk. Attraction relates to the perceived importance and pleasure linked to the consumption of a game experience. Self-expression is connected to the tacit meaning, which consumption expresses to others about individual's characteristics and uniqueness. Centrality to lifestyle is observed from activities providing opportunity to bond with friends and interact with other spectators who share same interests. Risk relates to social and psychological risks related to vicarious achievement. Basically sense of personal achievement can be experienced as team performs well, but also there exist the risk that self-status might suffer during weaker periods. (Funk, Moorman & Ridinger, 2004).

Sport fans are a heterogeneous group (Quick, 2000) (Benkenstein & Ulrich, 2010) and their range varies from casual fans to committed season ticket holders (McDonald & Sherry, 2010). As presented, fans are often remarkably loyal to the team, but instead of being attached to team some customers are rather attached to specific players or coaches (Robinson & Trail, 2005). Still, it's questionable which types of fans are most preferred. If profits are only taken into consideration, according to Quick (2000) fanatics may even be less valuable than casual spectators looking for good entertainment and enjoyment.

The nature of loyalty is quite unique in sport. In traditional businesses customers might quite easily switch the provider, if they are treated below expectations. However, if a loyal fan is not satisfied with the experience, switching the favorite team is still very unlikely (Brownlee et al., 2008). For many fans there is actually only one supplier in the market as they particularly follow football played by their favorite team and not football in general (Lonsdale, 2004). It's argued that the demand for game tickets is inelastic (Winfree, 2009) (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 66), so the increase in ticket prices is not likely to diminish revenues. There are only few if any substitutes for team sport products (Winfree, 2009).

Also, only small correlation has been found between season ticket renewal and fans' income (Tapp, 2004) suggesting that spending on game-tickets is not dependent on fans income level. Perhaps more expensive purchases are cut first if less money is available. Actually spectator sport has been speculated to be an inferior good. Basically when people become wealthier they might

find more classy consumption habits decreasing sport's share of spending (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 66).

Associations people attach to the sport team might be more important in smaller cities because of their significance to communities (Roy, 2008). The role of a team in big city is probably weaker for the community compared to what is the role of small city's team. Larger cities have more flagships, which represent the city and construct people's view about it. In small city the team might be the most visible representative of the city, and therefore an influential force in the community. Additionally, the attendance numbers are typically higher in smaller cities relative to population.

Self-monitoring and sport clubs have been studied as well. The assumption is that persons with high self-monitoring are more likely to change their clubs as they would pick a more socially accepted choice, successful or popular team. However, no clear connection between high self-monitoring and team-switching was found. Consumers are motivated to stay loyal to their teams. If teams are not able to perform well on-field, clubs should aim to retain team image on socially acceptable level. (O'Dwyer & Richardson, 2003). Naturally fans prefer seeing their teams playing on top (Késenne, 2009). Obviously success has an impact on fan enjoyment in a game, but it does not explain or predict fans' future attendance (Quick, 2000).

Alternative views are also available. It has been presented that attendance has connection to team's position in the league, so significant share of fans are not staying loyal through weaker seasons (Tapp, 2004). However, on that specific research the analysis period went back to Second World War. For sure the league level has some impact on attendance, but typically if clubs with big and stable fan bases relegate they find their way back pretty quickly. So efforts to retain customers should be particularly important. Additionally, the same paper discussed about a survey of football fans revealing that 71% of them agreed strongly and additional 16% agreed slightly when asked do they consider themselves as loyal supporters (Tapp, 2004).

Naturally sport organizations can't solely rely on fans. Not all customers are fans, and additionally fanaticism doesn't always last. (Daniel, Quick & Van Leeuwen, 2002). Clubs should not take fans' loyalty for granted (Adamson, Jones & Tapp, 2006). Fans' central value for clubs needs to be respected. Besides staying loyal committed fans evaluate more likely the club and its products positively compared to fans with low club identification (Daniel, Quick & Van Leeuwen, 2002).

Casual spectators, who perceive sport more as a form of entertainment, may value additional service in games higher. In turn more committed fans don't really pay attention to such aspects. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp, 2006).

Compared to covered studies, which highlight customers' loyalty and commitment to teams, McDonald (1996, p. 5) presents quite interesting views. He referred to John Kasky's survey in Money Magazine about the values professional sport teams offer to fans. The survey presented that top seven priorities involved customer service aspects and were not related to team, sport or game itself. Rather they related such issues as convenience of public transportation to arena. The study was carried out among the fans of the major US leagues. It would be interesting to compare results with adequate survey of for example European football fans. So, alternative views also exist. In the end, most studies consider team sport customers extremely loyal and interested in teams' performance, which is also the hypothesis in this particular study.

Then Greenwell et al. (2007) tried to understand critical aspects of spectator's experience. In their research customers were asked what they liked best and least in attending games. They made some interesting findings between gender and ages. They argued that men found sport appreciation most often as the best feature in the event. In turn women typically mentioned issues like atmosphere and game entertainment. Also older customers mentioned sport appreciation most often whereas younger mentioned facility or game entertainment. Regarding negative factors older and male customers were concerned with team quality. Younger and females were concerned with promotions. (Greenwell, Lee & Naeger, 2007). Naturally clubs have to take into account the needs of different customer groups. By adding or improving extensions the experience of a certain group can be enhanced. However, in these efforts one has to be sure not to weaken the experience of others. (Greenwell, Lee & Naeger, 2007).

Fink & Parker (2009) explored the differences in spectators' motives for watching American football game in which their favorite teams were involved versus games without them. The results showed that the top motives for watching favorite team's game and game without it are same. Drama ranked first before physical skill and social motives. Only the mean scores of these motives were little lower in games without favorite teams. However more significant differences were found in comparison between genders. Women scored higher on the motive of family and physical attractiveness. In turn men valued drama, appreciation of physical skill, aesthetics and knowledge

higher. The authors suggested that the drama of the game, the physical skills of the players and the social activities surrounding the games should be highlighted in successful marketing strategies. However, activating spectators' identification would be an important aspect in marketing favorite teams for fans. Also it was acknowledged that the suitability to families' needs to be ensured to appeal women, since they scored relatively high the family motive. (Fink & Parker, 2009). This research didn't specify if they meant watching games on site or on TV. The survey was also conducted with participants in sport, fitness and health –related course. Probably the differences in motives would be more significant if such survey would be carried out with enthusiastic fans of certain teams.

### 3.2. Classifications of fans

Previous chapter showed that there is definitely no one united form of sport customer. Consequently different efforts to classify them have been made. Typically models base on fans' characteristics and motivations. As previously noted, loyalty is regarded as perhaps the most important feature among fans differentiating them from customers of other businesses. Two concepts of loyalty are particularly discussed, loyalty to the team and loyalty to the sport. The study pays attention to both of these as relevant features explaining the behavior of different fans. Next two models of fans' classification are presented, which both have acknowledged the importance of loyalty. These classifications have identified which drivers are present in different fans' behavior and attendance.

Smith & Westerbeek (2003) reproduced a classification originally created by Smith & Stewart (1999), which divided sport fans to five groups. They reasoned fans' classification by their incentive to attend game and on the type of loyalty. The groups are presented below.

Type	Incentive	Loyalty
Aficionado	Quality Performance	Loyal to the game
Theatregoer	Entertainment, Excitement	Moderate team loyalty
Passionate Partisan	Identification with team	Strong team loyalty
Champ Follower	Winning team	Loyalty related to success
Reclusive Partisan	Identification with team	Strong team loyalty, but moderate attendance

Table 1: Fan categories (Smith & Stewart 1999, modified version by Smith & Westerbeek 2003)

Aficionado is a fan, who is loyal to the sport and not to a specific team. He/she wants to see games with good quality performances. The theatregoer has only little loyalty to the team and is thrilled by the entertainment/enjoyment provided by the game event. These first two classes have in common that their behavior is driven by attraction to the sport and not by attachment to team. In turn, the latter three classes are all attached to a team. The passionate partisan identifies him-/herself strongly with the favorite team. He/she is faithful, attends games often and follows team through good and worse. In turn, success excites the champ follower. Loyalty lasts as long as the team is successful. The reclusive partisan is loyal to the team, but attends games only occasionally. He/she might follow team also through media channels, and others typically have an influence to their behavior. (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003).

Basu & Dick's have studied elements in customer loyalty generally. They created a fourfold based on customers relative attitude toward a brand and their repeat patronage (Basu & Dick, 1994). If both repeat patronage and relative attitude are high, loyalty is present and it is naturally the most preferred of the four available options. High relative attitude combined with low repeat patronage is identified as latent loyalty. In such cases marketers should try to address and remove customers' constraints. In turn low relative attitude with high repeat patronage is spurious loyalty. Then marketer may for example attempt to create more apparent differentiation to achieve loyalty. No loyalty exists if both repeat patronage and relative attitude are low. The provider may then try to increase customers' awareness or somehow modify situational elements to increase loyalty. (Basu

& Dick, 1994). Tapp (2004) applied Basu & Dick's framework to football supporters. He named relative attitude as attitudinal loyalty and repeat patronage as behavioral loyalty and placed different fan classes on the fourfold based on their characteristics (Tapp, 2004).

		<b>Behavioral loyalty</b>	
		High	Low
<b>Attitudinal loyalty</b>	High	Collectors  Fanatics  Repertoire Fans	Committed casuals
	Low		Carefree Casuals

Figure 3: Dick & Basu's framework of customer loyalty applied to football supporters (Tapp, 2004)

Collectors are very enthusiastic fans, who additionally collect team-related items. Being a fan is big part of their identity. Fanatics are close to collectors. Clearest difference is that collecting team-related merchandise is not that important. Still, they are highly committed and follow team closely. Repertoire fans appreciate many aspects in the game and are less devoted to one team compared to fanatics. Although they attended faithfully supported team's games, they might likely attend also games not involving favorite team. Casual fans typically attend less than five matches each season and they tend to have lighter links to the club and community. Typically they have moved to those places where clubs are located on adult age. However, casuals are divided into two groups based on commitment to the club. The groups have been named as committed and carefree casuals. Regarding committed casuals the author reasoned that attitudinal loyalty didn't reflect to behavior because of situational influences. Committed casuals differed from carefree casuals in the sense that they agreed strongly if asked are they loyal. Then 78% of committed were aware when the team had the next game compared to only 37% of carefrees. Also, carefrees attended clearly more often games, which didn't involve the specific team. Basically carefrees consider football more as an entertainment option and identifying as a team's fan was not really

important. In turn committed were authentic fans, but other activities were equally or more important for them. (Tapp, 2004).

These presented classifications have quite a lot in common. Basically only clear difference between the two models is that Tapp has not identified champ follower. Otherwise all remaining classes have corresponsive type in the competing model. The passionate partisan have similar features with fanatics and/or collectors. Then the aficionado resembles the repertoire fan. The reclusive partisan is close to the committed casual, and the theatregoer share similar characteristics with the carefree casual.

Both models provided good insight studying different customers in sport context. However, Tapp's model is chosen to be used later in this study. Particular advantage in Tapp's model is classification based on both behavioral and attitudinal loyalty, which helps in perceiving classes' differences. The field survey presented later in the study employs similar classification basis. Indeed, Smith & Westerbeek's Champ followers group is now excluded. If success motivates them, they can be regarded as welcome bonus on good seasons. Still, marketing efforts have pretty little to do with team's on-field performance. Of course it could be discussed how this group could transform to more loyal customers, but the focus is now on enhancement of existing and more obvious customer relations. One small modification will be made to the employed Tapp's classification. Collectors and fanatics are really close. Merchandise sales are the most significant feature to differentiate the two groups, and this study is not really focusing on that subject. Therefore these groups will be combined. These customers will be discussed in the following sections with name fanatics. To conclude this discussion of different fan types, the study will later focus on next classes:

- Carefree casuals
- Committed casuals
- Repertoire fans
- Fanatics

### 3.3. Motivations to attend games

As chapter 3.1. showed the list of potential factors explaining sport customers' attendance and behavior is extensive (Grieve et al., 2008). This chapter takes a look on features which might have

an impact to game-attendance. General discussion of the topic will be followed by presentation of couple models, which try to explain game-attendance behavior. The research of sport event attendance has been classified broadly into two groups. Typically in the first group the focus has been on the development of models to investigate factors influencing attendance. The second group is wider, investigating a range of factors that influence the attendance of fans at games. (Dale et al., 2005). Several person-specific internal and external factors might have an impact on individual's game-attendance decision. However, each research and results must be considered carefully as they are very often sport and country specific.

Every sport has its unique features which might especially appeal to certain customers (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007, p. 152). Spectators have pure interest towards the game (Mason, 1999) and they are curious (Greenwell, Lee & Naeger, 2007). The attractiveness of sport product is based on the rivalry between clubs, and leagues should foster inter-club competitiveness. (Mason, 1999). Besides many other not that game-central features might determine event's attendance. It has been argued that both physical facility, like arena or stadium, (Fink, Greenwell & Pastore, 2002) and atmosphere (Benkenstein & Ulrich, 2010) have significant impact on customers' attitudes and behaviors. In the context of minor league baseball the influence of new stadiums on the game attendance has been studied. New stadiums are promoted with their ability to create benefits both for the communities and for the sport teams. Attendance numbers increased almost outstanding 70% after the introduction of a new stadium. In average the numbers also remained high in the following years. However, the attendance growth is smaller with major league baseball teams and is estimated to be around 10-30%. (Roy, 2008). Still, it is hard to consider these findings generalizable in all sports. Building new stadiums alone won't definitely bring people on seats. Still, if arenas/stadiums are regarded inadequate, it has negative impact on attendance (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 67). It is also presented that if a game is broadcasted it decreases stadium attendance (Buraimo, 2008).

There might be differences in attendance depending if the team is located in large or small market. One research was conducted among two teams' spectators, who played in same minor league. The teams were located on areas with population of 5.9 million and 0.6 million. The average attendance of the large market team was higher (8,974) than the small market team's (5,600). Anyway, the percentage of season ticket holders was significantly higher with the small market team (20.9 %) than the large market team's (6.0 %). Indeed, the small market team's

spectators attended games more often. Large and small market consumers may attend sporting events as often, but the large market consumers share consumption across more offerings. Therefore the authors suggested that small market teams should focus their marketing efforts on fostering customer relations trying to convince spectators attend more often. In turn large market teams should employ marketing actions reaching as many different customers as possible, since a large number of them attend only few games each year. (DeSchriver & Robinson, 2003). The way how club approaches its fan base might be dependent on the size of the market (Williams, 2007).

Theodorakis & Alexandris (2008) support quite natural assumption, that the role of on-field sport performances is most crucial. They studied if service quality could predict spectator's behavioral intentions in professional soccer. They found that the relationship was weak in this context. This finding of sport customers' behavior is not coherent with assumptions present in traditional service markets. In sport business improving the service quality is not the key in managing customers. The authors still found that the service quality had importance in word-of-mouth communications and in spectator's willingness to recommend games for others (Alexandris & Theodorakis, 2008).

In the discussion of the attendance emphasis should be put also to the true income generated by ticket sales. Sometimes clubs might share free tickets to attract new potential customers, which obviously increases attendance numbers. However, the results in the long run are questionable. Clubs might hope to create higher demand in the future, but how do customers act when the seller eventually increases ticket prices (Winfrey, 2009). Indeed, if the producer wants to create high-quality image of its product, it has to show in price (Alaja, 2000, p. 89). Therefore, if tickets are given for free, clubs should consider closely to whom to give them. One option trying to manage attendance, ticket sales and games' demand is using variable ticket pricing. In such methods the prices are dependent on the expected demand of a particular game, which might be influenced by the day of the week or a specific opponent. (Brown et al., 2007) (Crompton & Howard, 2004). Instead of being attached to a specific team, the motivation to attend might be driven by specific features in games. Some fans are rather attached to a player, a coach or to other things in the sport experience (Robinson & Trail, 2005).

Yoshida & James (2010) studied customers' repurchase intentions in sporting events. They acknowledge that sport marketing researchers have investigated two types of customer

satisfaction: game satisfaction and service satisfaction. They then present a model in which the behavioral intentions to attend games is being constructed by these two types of elements. Indeed, they identify three constructs affecting both of them. Customers' perceptions regarding stadium employees, facility access and facility space have an impact on the service satisfaction. In turn opponent characteristics, player performance and game atmosphere are the determinants in game satisfaction. (James & Yoshida, 2010).



Figure 4: The antecedents and consequences of game and service satisfaction (James & Yoshida, 2010)

James & Yoshida (2010) concluded that sports clubs should foster both game and service satisfaction. However, game satisfaction had more significant impact to fans' intentions attending future games. From marketer's perspective there are in the end quite few options to affect the game satisfaction, so the emphasis should be on developing the service dimension. Some critics can still be given to this model. Other research in this academic field have regarded for example geographical roots, communal attachment (Szymanski, 2010), club identity (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008) and exceptional loyalty (Adamson, Jones & Tapp, 2006) (O'Dwyer & Richardson, 2003) as particularly relevant elements in the sport customer's behavior. It's quite obvious that such features affect in the sport context. These features are interestingly absent in this model. The model still provides one vision how spectators' intentions to attend may be constructed. Unfortunately, with marketing activities clubs can basically have only very little

impact on frameworks' antecedents. Additionally the model has quite transactional view to sport customers' game-attendance. So from customer relation point of view the model provides pretty narrow view to sport customers' behavior.

Other perspective to view the construction of sport spectators' satisfaction is provided by Daniel et al. (2002). As a basis for their research they used disconfirmation of expectations model (DEM), which has been present in mainstream marketing literature of customer satisfaction (Patterson, 1993). In the DEM perceived performance is compared to initial expectations, which results to positive, negative or zero disconfirmation. Enhanced satisfaction is reached if expectations are exceeded. Satisfaction is the outcome if expectations are met. Weaker performance leads to dissatisfaction.

Daniel et al. modified DEM for spectator sport and created sport spectator satisfaction model (SSSM). In SSSM club identification (individual defines him- or herself as part of the club) and win/lose phenomenon (the heart of sport competition) have been identified as sport specific characteristics. The experience is divided into two service dimensions. The game itself is considered as core service. Peripheral service dimension consists of all non-game supplements such as parking, half-time entertainment, etc.

Club identification and win/lose feature have an effect on fans' perceptions regarding performance, disconfirmation and overall customer satisfaction. However, the authors found that only club identification has an influence on expectations, so no connection between win/lose phenomenon and expectations was identified. (Daniel, Quick & Van Leeuwen, 2002). More argumentation could have been used for this absence as the reason remained somehow unclear. As a spectator the inconsistency, uncertain result and both teams' desire to win would be one of the basic expectations at least regarding the core product. In following figure the SSSM and the links between different dimensions are presented.

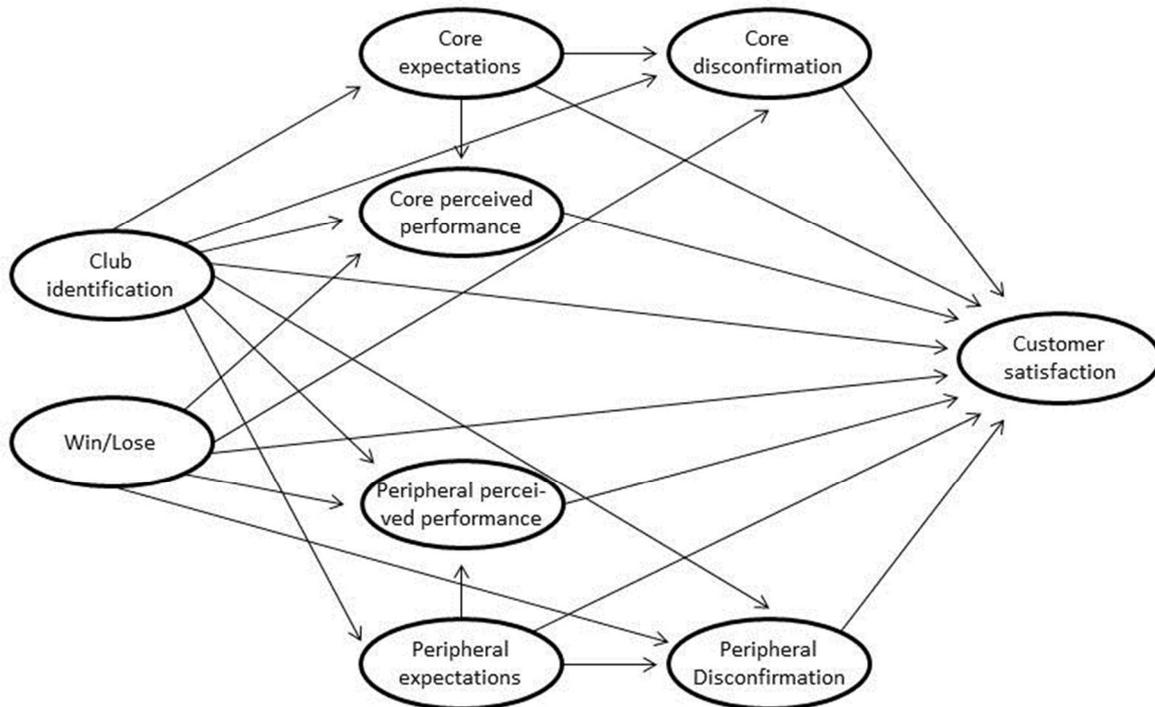


Figure 5: Sport spectator satisfaction model, SSSM (Daniel, Quick & Van Leeuwen, 2002)

Quite similarly with James & Yoshida's model, the SSSM provides quite few aspects to be taken into consideration when the focus is on long-term customer relations. Both these models seem to support the idea of maintaining customer satisfaction on a decent level to generate repeat purchases, which is not certain in team sport. To explain attendance drivers and relation development a little more comprehensive perspective is required.

As an alternative for studying sport consumer behavior as a consequence of service/product satisfactions, several attempts have been made to list the motives for sport event attendance. Grieve et al. (2008) reasoned that particularly eight motives are relevant: escape, economic, eustress, self-esteem, group affiliation, entertainment, family, and aesthetics. Escape refers to one's diversion from usual life. Some customers may also be driven by economic features, gained for example by betting. Eustress is the result of gaining excitement and stimulation in sport. Sport events may also enhance one's self-esteem. Group affiliation refers to event's social nature. Sport customers search often also entertainment. Family relates to the spending time with family. Aesthetic beauty concerns one's desire to see the artistic beauty and the grace in sport. In their field study the authors found interesting differences between the motives to attend either individual or team sports. The results showed that eustress, self-esteem, group affiliation,

entertainment and family were prominent drivers in team sport consumption. In turn with individual sports the role of aesthetic motivation was significant. Escape and economic motives showed no difference between sport types. (Grieve et al., 2008).

In the end, concerning the purpose of this study, perhaps the most appropriate explanation is given by Beaton et al. (2009). They created a model explaining motives for sport event attendance, which took into consideration both theoretical and practical needs. They reviewed previous academic research of the subject, which provided several scales to explain attendance motives. According to them general recap of different indicators was still missing. So based on their recap of studies they created compact list of five motivational facets explaining spectators' attendance behavior: Socialization, Performance, Excitement, Esteem, and Diversion. This conceptualization of spectator motives is called SPEED facets. (Beaton et al., 2009). The elements are next presented more in detail.

### **SPEED Facets of Sport Event Motivation**

<b>Socialization</b>	Sport event as an opportunity to interact with family, friends, and other spectators
<b>Performance</b>	Belief that sport event provides excellence, beauty, and creativity of athletic performance
<b>Excitement</b>	Sport event provides excitement, drama and uncertainty of the game outcome
<b>Esteem</b>	Individual perceives a heightened sense of personal and collective esteem when favorite team wins
<b>Diversion</b>	Sport event provides an escape from the normal routines of everyday life

Table 2: Facets of Motivation for Sport Event Attendance (Beaton et al., 2009)

Beaton et al.'s SPEED facets were created to combine the key elements in different scales in the sport consumer research explaining attendance motivation. Compared to motives identified by Grieve et al., SPEED actually contains same elements, but in more concise form. Sport attendance discussion sometimes highlights fans' attachment to specific player or coach. The assumption here is that such respondents value higher the performance-facet, and this feature is not studied

individually. The performances provided by their favorite athletes inspire them. SPEED provides also a better customer relation perspective than SSSM or James & Yoshida's model, which both employed pretty transactional approach. Additionally, Beaton et al. (2009) noticed that attendants, who had visited games before, more likely agreed games to provide SPEED benefits and attendants with no prior visits valued SPEED benefits lower. So regarding the upcoming field survey the facets should apply well for studying motivational elements of existing customer relations in team sport. SPEED was originally created to conclude the facets present in the literature concerning sport attendance motivation. Current study tries to identify sport customer segments and drivers for their behavior. The intention is not to create complex entity but rather a compact model of customer relation enhancement in team sport business. For this purpose SPEED provides good foundation to explain the motivation of varying sport customers.

## 4. Managing customer relations in sport business

This final section of the theoretical review discusses the management of game-attending fans' relations. As previous chapters presented loyal customers are extremely important for sport organization and therefore much attention should be paid on them. A brief review is given of central features in sport customer relation management. Later more detailed guidelines for sport customers' management will be covered. The chapter considers which elements are essential in understanding and developing sport customers and fans. It is central for the study, because suggestions for team sport customer relation development are later presented. The foundation is constructed here.

### 4.1. Central features in sport customer relations

In all businesses fostering existing customer relations is one of the key elements in companies' operations. It's generally recognized that acquiring new customers is clearly more expensive than maintaining existing customers (Zineldin, 2006). Central marketing challenge is managing loyalty, improving customers' loyalty towards products and services (Basu & Dick, 1994). Customer relations have to provide value beyond the core product (Zineldin, 2006).

Sport business is not different. "All sports marketing transactions, in fact, involve some type of relationship marketing". The relations are one of the most powerful aspects in the sport marketing. (Bee & Kahle, 2006). Relation marketing activities move the focus from the transactions to the relations (Stotlar, 2002). The key for sports organization's success and competitiveness are loyal game-attending fans and their management (Bee & Kahle, 2006) (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). Fans' attachment and loyalty is extremely important asset of a team-sport organization (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008) (Gladden, Irwin & Sutton, 2001).

For sustaining or even enhancing loyalty marketers need to be market focused and be aware of their customers' preferences (Rundle-Thiele, 2006). Companies can try to create loyalty by differentiating relation or by giving recognition to loyal customers (Zineldin, 2006). Sport organizations need to enhance their fan bases, find new fans and help the existing to become more loyal (Greenwell, Mahony & Park, 2010). Separate marketing strategies should be considered for different fan types (Dale et al., 2005).

It is suggested that in future smart sport marketers will shift their communications away from the object (club or sport) and highlight the element of belonging to something. Traditional demographic or psychographic market segmentation is in danger of losing its magic. In highly fragmented, information overloaded society sport consumers are not that easily defined into conventional market segments. Instead they will increasingly belong to tribal groupings, sharing similar principles and values. (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004, p. 77).

The key to segmentation in future's sport business is identifying the core values and behaviors that release members' extreme support, passion and ultimately their cash. Tribalism "is the currency of future's sport marketing" as it brings small groups of people together and unites them through values and identity. "There is nothing more powerful in marketing than that what makes you and I think we're the same". (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004, p. 79). Successful team sport clubs like Manchester United have values, which are evident for club's fans and employees (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). "Manchester United is about more than victories, it's the tradition within the team and the sport" (Cooper et al., 2006). The bonds between club and highly committed fans might even become stronger, if team is relegated to lower level (Groepel-Klein, Koenigstorfer & Schmitt, 2010).

Clubs should aim for creating and enhancing strong club identity using non-product-related attributes. Fostering interaction among fans, cultivating team's tradition and delivering extraordinary experiences are important in relation management. This is supported for example by providing branded sports bars, club museum or by organizing fan tournaments. (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). Sport organizations should try to build high levels of identification among fans, therefore marketing campaigns should value club and fan identities highly (Anderson, Fink & Trail, 2003).

One essential element in clubs' management is the communication between the clubs and fans (Dale et al., 2005). Responding to customers' concerns is important to retain them (Zineldin, 2006). To manage clubs' operations in appropriate way it is important to understand customers' expectations regarding club management. Good boards are visible and they share fans' emotional connection with the team. Although boards are not directly affecting to on-field success, they can still be accountable since they hire coach and take part to the creation of club culture (McDonald & Sherry, 2010).

Naturally the office can have only limited impact on on-field performance. There are still some interesting findings regarding team and player appearance's impact on fans, which can be taken into consideration in club management. If two players are playing equally well, fans appreciate more if the performance is achieved due to hard effort compared to if it is believed to be natural ability (Burnett et al., 2002). This proposes and supports old general belief that fans love hard-working players. This issue is definitely worth consideration while marketing campaign/activities are planned. Another subject is that "spectators appear to be happier after unexpected win or more upset after an unexpected loss" (Anderson, Fink & Trail, 2003). Instead of just highlighting own team's capabilities in marketing communication, it might be valuable to give credit on opponent's strengths as well.

The weak relationship between service quality and repurchase intentions is one characteristic in sport, which sets challenges for the management and marketing of a club (Alexandris & Theodorakis, 2008). As previously noted, perhaps the most essential part of sport product, the game itself, is not manageable from the office. On-field success fluctuates. Therefore clubs should not rely on success but rather try to create other bonds with customers. No team can win all games (Cooper et al., 2006). On-field success can't be the only element explaining customers' behavior. Deeper relations are needed to maintain customer loyalty and also club's profitability also through weaker seasons, in which strong club culture helps.

Currently profitability is an apparent challenge for almost every professional club. In this trend, corporate involvement and B2B-customers role probably will not decrease. However their interest is driven by sport's popularity (Gladden, Irwin & Sutton, 2001). For sport organizations stadium-visiting fans are the most important target group in marketing activities (Bauer, Sauer & Schmitt, 2005) (Kim & Trail, 2011). Most successful sport organizations understand sport consumers best (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003, p. 52). Traditionally clubs have often treated their fans in transactional way (Lonsdale, 2004). "Boards of sport organizations must balance commercial success with a winning team and recognition of products' importance to season ticket holders, and the importance of season ticket holders to the product" (McDonald & Sherry, 2010). Besides being loyal season ticket holders are important for clubs as they usually buy tickets before season providing flexibility for clubs. Indeed the churn rate of new season ticket holders is five times higher than the rate with long-term attendees. (McDonald H., 2010). Most clubs pay little attention to relation marketing, although its elements apply especially well in sport. Clubs should

think what the values of their customers mean for the organization and business. With heterogeneous customer bases, as often in sport, segmentation works well. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp, 2006). Carrying out market research could be a good option to achieve better understanding of varying customer, to help sport marketers in reaching different segments and to design campaigns appropriately (Anderson, Fink & Trail, 2003).

#### 4.2. Guidelines for sport fan management

This chapter first reviews how sport customers' perceptions of clubs' management is constructed. Customer relations are always two-sided. Therefore attention has to be how customers construct their understanding of club's officials. Later a compact list of guidelines concerning sport customer relation management is provided.

According to McDonald & Sherry (2010) nonprofit organizations often employ inclusive strategies. For example stakeholders can be given official positions in order to reinforce involvement and transparency. This is regarded as a good practice in organizations with high customer/member involvement, and it could be a good approach also with the highly involved fans and sport organizations. They also carried out a qualitative research and found that fans' perceptions of boards are produced by three factors, which are board performance (the 'functioning' of the board), on-field performance and fans' inclusion. The authors acknowledged that there's a relationship between board performance and on-field performance. However, the results confirmed that making members/fans feeling included affected most to fans' overall satisfaction.

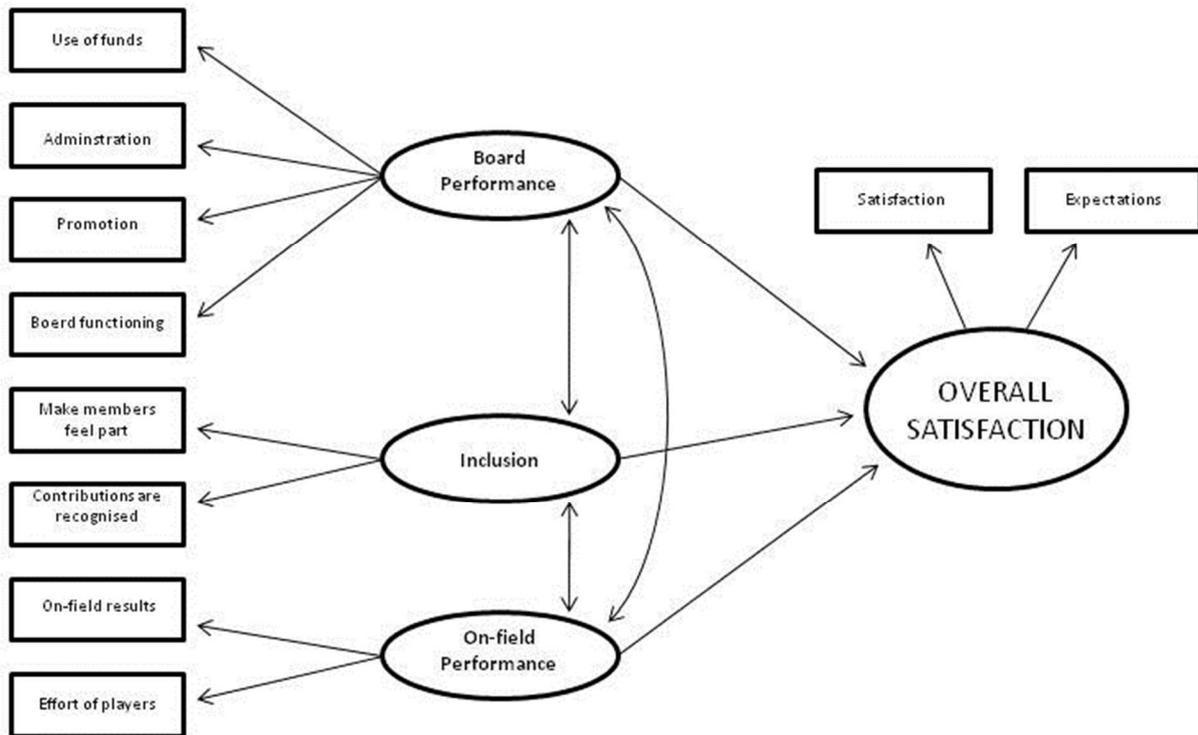


Figure 6: The relationships between perceptions of board performance (McDonald & Sherry, 2010)

Fans' inclusion had strong influence to overall satisfaction of the board, whereas the impact of board performance and on-field performance were found to be relatively low (McDonald & Sherry, 2010). Significant finding here is the role of inclusion. It is definitely an element, to which marketing decisions can have impact on. Coherent with today's marketing trends, clubs should aim for more interactive methods in marketing. Two-sided discussion with fans, making them feel part of the club, enabling participation, recognizing their efforts and role to on- and off-field performance would most probably lead to stronger relations and commitment. Still, organizations must be careful. If fans are encouraged to provide suggestions/complaints, organizations have to somehow respond and act. Inaction likely generates dissatisfaction (Brownlee et al., 2008). Typically fans' dissatisfaction with club boards is driven by weak on-field results and unsuccessful fund-raising campaigns (McDonald & Sherry, 2010).

Gladden et al. (2001) have provided guidelines for relations management in sport environment:

1. Developing an enhanced understanding of the customer

Professional sport teams should try to learn as much as possible of their consumers. It's essential to know consumers' perceptions of the brand. By enhanced relations responding to consumers' needs will develop. Technology can assist in these efforts.

2. Increasing the interactions between the consumer and the brand

Indeed teams should strive for enhancing regular interactions with customers. Encouraging players and coaches to attend would be a significant improvement. Product extensions such as sport bars or fan shops would also increase teams' visibility.

3. Reinforcing and rewarding loyalty to the team brand

Traditionally in sport environment customers are forced to pay for being loyal. Rather than forcing customers to pay, voluntary and symbolic offerings could be provided. Recognizing and rewarding fan loyalty is becoming more prominent.

4. Consistent integrated marketing communication to reinforce key brand associations

Long-term vision should be employed in the planning of marketing activities. Instead of on-field performances, which are always uncertain, emphasis should be moved to the core values the sport organization wants to promote and communicate. Sport teams should put less focus on success in their marketing efforts.

List 2: Strategies for fan relation development (Gladden, Irwin & Sutton, 2001)

With these guidelines clubs can create coherent plan for their customer relation management and development. Indeed, given principles support being close to customer by which more involved and interactive relations could be created.

If customers in sport environment are extremely loyal compared to traditional businesses, why they might not attend games? Despite loyalty the average churn rates in sport leagues and with season ticket holders are quite adequate to traditional businesses (McDonald H., 2010). This is pretty surprising statement as in most cases brand-switching is not an option for sport customers. Fans, which didn't renew their season tickets, have often life situation including less than five years old children. Indeed, these fans considered that the season ticket was not reasoned at their situations. Satisfaction with the team, winning or entertaining matches had no clear relation to season ticket renewal. Also income and loyalty had only little connection. (Tapp, 2004). This

suggests that clubs might try to reduce customers' attendance boundaries by providing customized offerings for their particular needs.

Quite Interestingly Daniel et al. (2002) provide alternative view. They discuss that fanaticism might be reduced due to different factors relating to teams, tickets and sport itself and that clubs can fight against this by providing highest possible customer satisfaction (Daniel, Quick & Van Leeuwen, 2002). In the end, is that pretty optimistic? The results and experiences in sport just are sometimes below expectations, and it is part of the product. The on-field performance and execution can't be taken for granted. Being a fan and loyal customer means occasionally disappointments, anger, and frustration when team is playing below expectations. Customer satisfaction just can't constantly be highest possible, but still most of the customers are not even considering changing the provider. In long-run the most successful teams have been able to build strong fan bases, which carry out them also through weaker seasons. Rather than providing constantly highest possible customer satisfaction, clubs should focus on enhancing relations and interaction between club and customers. With such methods a mutual understanding of club's activities and goals could be created.

Permanent seat licensing (PSL) is one relation marketing tool in sport environment (McDaniel & Moore, 2005), by which additional value can be provided for certain customers. It is a form of pre-production relation marketing. PSL programs are typically used to finance the construction of new stadium/arena, and they have been successfully used in the major American football league NFL. PSL seat is acquired by paying certain fee. The holder controls the license and has the right to purchase a season ticket for that particular seat each year. Indeed, he may transfer or sell the license later. The teams also gather information of PSL customers and try to enhance products and services according to their wishes. Their views are already taken into account when new stadiums are still planned. Responses regarding PSL programs have been mostly positive. The program provides special treatment, attracts customers with purchase power and desire to commit for future season ticket purchases. (McDaniel & Moore, 2005).

However, in NFL the attendance figures are impressive with average around 70000. The demand for tickets is so high that people are willing to pay for a guaranteed season ticket and seat. In leagues with lower levels of attendance and even if tickets are basically always available, such programs might not fit that well. It is also questioned does paying premium for guaranteed season

ticket really provide value for customer (Gladden, Irwin & Sutton, 2001). Sport organizations have to respect customers and try to involve them as partners, not just as receivers of marketing efforts (Stotlar, 2002). If PSL seats are provided, sport organizations should think closely how to treat both PSL and other customers. All customer groups have to be appreciated. Indeed, variable ticket pricing familiar from hotel or airline business can be employed to generate more revenues (Brown et al., 2007). As the demand for individual games vary according to opponent or game-day, clubs can try to adjust their supply and prices accordingly.

For organizations' sustainability prospects should be also taken into consideration. Students have been regarded as important target market for future ticket sales (Brownlee et al., 2008). To estimate customer's value for the organization all future purchases have to be considered (Zineldin, 2006), and quite naturally the biggest potential lies in youth with whom the emotional bonds are established early. In sport already kids know their favorite teams (Tapp, 2004). Understanding fans' development through their life cycles would be beneficial for clubs. Clubs could organize already for kids some program and start involvement in early stages. Sporting clubs/schools or player visits in schools are examples of such actions, where bonds between future fans and clubs could be created.

## 5. Theoretical framework

Previous chapters provided insight to team sport business and to its customers. This following framework tries to explain the motivation for attendance of the identified different fan classes. The framework employs SPEED facets of sport attendance motivation. Indeed, Tapp's classification of fan classes is used. So, four different fan/customer classes (carefree casuals, committed casuals, repertoire fans, fanatics) are present in the framework. The previous chapters presented that small modifications were made to the original reference model. The fourth and last theory review section discussed how customer relations are managed in sport context. The framework presents which actions are central in each identified fan group.

In the left side of framework the SPEED facets are presented as the source for attendance-motivation among fans. Then the four identified fan classes are shown in the middle, whose behavior is driven by SPEED facets. The right side in the framework presents, which customer relation elements are central in each class.

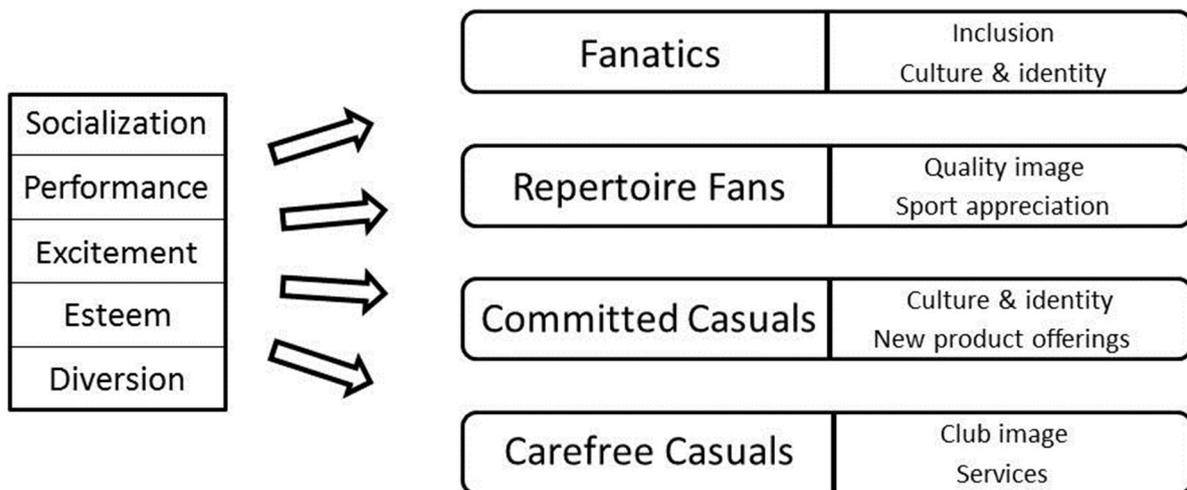


Figure 7: Theoretical Framework

Basically here the Beaton et al's SPEED facets are identified as the motivators to attend games. Although the framework doesn't suggest connection with SPEED facets and specific fan class, some assumptions can be made based on theory review. The repertoire fans are attracted by high-quality sport performances and competition on-field. They visit games to see good sport. (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003) (Tapp, 2004). Therefore Performance probably explains best their game-

attendance. For the fanatics esteem is clearly one characteristic. They are highly involved and live tightly with team's performances. Additionally they are more loyal to the club than to the sport. (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003) (Tapp, 2004). Club's culture and identity are important for them. They feel themselves as club members and show the support for the team together with other fans (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). So, socialization is regarded as other central element among them. The committed casuals share emotional bond to the team, but for varying reasons they don't show it in behavior. Still, similar with the fanatics esteem is viewed to explain their behavior. (Tapp, 2004). Diversion is regarded as other most relevant facet with the committed casuals. In the discussion of fan characteristics, it was noted that varying situational issues might prevent their attendance. Although they are loyal, families or other busies in their lives set limits. If they are able to attend, the game is expected to provide a brief escape from life's commitments. (Adamson, Jones & Tapp, 2006) (Tapp, 2004). In turn with the carefree casuals excitement and socialization are valued as the most important elements. They are looking for entertaining event, to which they can go with others (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003) (Tapp, 2004).

In developing customer relations clubs have to understand who their customers are, increase interaction between them and club, reinforce loyalty, and aim to reinforce key values in marketing communication (Gladden, Irwin & Sutton, 2001). Following relation management strategies can help clubs to achieve presented goals among different fans.

Inclusion is identified central element with attitudinal most loyal fan classes, fanatics and committed casuals. Inclusion was already noted as main contributor for fans' satisfaction with clubs' boards. Highly committed fans want to be involved in club's operations. (McDonald & Sherry, 2010). Club official should seek ways to fill these needs, and provide options for fans to contribute. Offering fans gatherings or interactive communication channels and giving them possibilities to take part to club's operations could enhance feeling of inclusiveness. Among fanatics fostering club-culture and -identity is regarded as a second element for relation development (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). Clubs could try to organize meetings or provide gathering places for fans.

With committed casuals culture and identity is also regarded as central element. They are loyal customers who feel attached to the club. Their busy lives prevent them from more active participation, but they still support the team and feel its identity as their own. (Tapp, 2004)

Fostering club values, identity and culture would keep up their bond with the club (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). If customers are too busy to attend games, providing new alternative ways to consume the product could also enhance relations with these customers.

Repertoire fans attend games to see quality sport performances (Tapp, 2004) (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003). This class does not care that much about additional services. The game itself is important no matter where it is played. The marketing departments can do relatively little impact on what is happening on-field (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007) (Alaja, 2000). However, some efforts can be made to foster the image of high-quality games. The club officials could perhaps consider how to communicate and market their product so that quality image would be shared. Uniform practice in club's communication would probably give cohesive and good-quality image of the product. A characteristic with this specific fan group is sport appreciation (Tapp, 2004). They value highly the beauty and the athletic performance in sport, which are relevant to recognize in the activities directed to the repertoire fans.

For the carefree casuals the most important element in games is entertainment (Tapp, 2004) (Smith & Westerbeek, 2003). However, a club basically can't be something for everyone. It has to foster those core values which are important in club's and team's operations. Existing club image is central for most valuable asset, loyal fans, and should always be somehow present. (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). Hopefully it helps also some carefree casuals to find the club interesting and motivates them to visit games more often. Services in games should also be at adequate level (Adamson, Jones & Tapp, 2006). Disappointments on that area are probably more decisive among carefree casuals looking for enjoyment than with other more loyal customers. On the other hand, appropriate services for sure enhance the satisfaction in other fan classes as well.

The framework addresses SPEED facets' role in motivating the identified fan segments. Indeed, the framework suggests what features in customer relation management are central among each fan group. The following field research seeks information for classifying varying sport customers. Also, it tries to identify which SPEED-elements are valued among fans. Then it explores which specific relation development efforts would be most appropriate for them. To conclude, the field survey is looking answers for study's central research questions presented in the introduction:

- *How to classify sport fans based on their characteristics?*
- *What features explain fans' game-attendance?*
- *Which elements are central in developing customer relations with different fans?*

The findings provide managerial implications for following topic:

- *How to enhance customer relations and business in team sport?*

## 6. Field survey

A field survey was conducted in order to test previous theoretical review and constructed theoretical framework. Football fans and other potential football customers were considered as very relevant target group for the survey. Finland is one of the few countries in world, where football is clearly not the number one sport. Finnish football is performing relatively weakly from business perspective compared to other European countries. Large potential for developing business and better customer relations should exist. Therefore exploring the enhancement of Finnish football customers is interesting research topic. This section first explains how the field survey was carried out and designed. Later the results are presented and analyzed.

### 6.1. Data collection procedure

The questionnaire was placed on active discussion forum among people interested in football. The motive to carry out survey there was the chance to reach large group of potential respondents for football-related survey. This target group probably considered the subject relatively interesting, and hopefully appreciated this effort to enhance football business knowledge. Although this study focused on the customers of team sport products in general, the focus group in the survey was football customers. Target was finding game-attending customers of Finnish football.

The administrators of active web-discussion site futisforum2.org allowed gathering responses on their site. The site has for example own sections for Finnish football, foreign football, football in general and general discussion all including additional sub-sections. Some sections on the site are open only for registered members. Overall, the site is not only popular among hardcore football fans. It gathers all kinds of people with some interest in football or in discussion with others who like football. The survey topic was placed under section football culture, which is open for all visitors on site. The topic name was "Answer to questionnaire! What do you value in following Finnish football?" The introduction message explained the purpose of the study and asked visitors to answer by following attached link. Answering did not require being registered member, which was also mentioned in the introduction. Everyone who visited the topic had the opportunity to answer the questionnaire.

Initial plan was actually to place the survey-link on the web-site's front page. However, the administrators were not responsive and the idea was not accepted. Only the permission to carry

out survey in discussion topic was given. This was little unfortunate. If link had been available on the front-page more visitors would have seen it and been aware of the questionnaire. Probably more respondents and relatively more casuals would have answered. Now as the questionnaire was placed on topic under football culture section, the risk was that avid readers and more loyal sport customers more likely answered the questionnaire. In the end the goal was finding team sport customers, which surely was achieved with this procedure.

Of course, not all football customers can be found through this method. At some extent this sample contains random sample error since it is not perfect representation of the population of interest (Birks & Malhotra, 2007, p. 83). The survey should be quite extensive to reach all possible football fan types in Finland. Still, football customers were definitely reached who provided valuable information for customer relation development in team sport business. So, the central target regarding group of respondents was reached.

## 6.2. Survey design

The chosen research method was to conduct web survey. Web surveys might have lower response rates compared to other survey modes but they provide clear advantages like speed and cost (Birks & Malhotra, 2007, s. 274) (Berzelak et al., 2008). Web survey provides an opportunity to carry out a research with smaller resources (Berzelak et al., 2008). For this study, web survey was regarded as effective method to reach relatively many potential respondents and to gather answers quickly.

Altogether the questionnaire had six pages consisting of 22 multiple choice questions and 3 open-ended questions. The questionnaire is available in appendix 1. Answers in multiple choices were required, but open-ended were optional. Questions about respondent's game-attendance behavior were designed to be as unambiguous as possible. Questions avoided giving different meanings for different respondents and tried to follow consistent frame (Birks & Malhotra, 2007, p. 385). Therefore respondents had not answer options like sometimes or occasionally. Instead answer options were objectively defined: 0-2, 3-5, etc. The questionnaire had also scale-questions to which respondents naturally answered according to their perceptions. Using web survey gave a chance to ensure the quality of answers. Respondents were not able to continue the survey if they didn't give answers to multiple choice questions, so no-response errors should have not existed. In one case part of respondent's answers were missing, but overall the quality was excellent. Only in

three open-ended questions respondents were able to choose whether to answer or not. The idea behind was to provide respondents option to complete questionnaire quickly and avoid drop outs. If the respondents chose not to answer open-ended questions, they still provided data for the study.

Basically the survey had three goals, which are particularly related to this thesis and research. The first goal was to classify respondents to the four fan segments. In the first two pages respondents were asked about their background and game-attendance behavior. These and two questions relating to respondents team loyalty, which were placed alongside SPEED questions on pages three and four, searched particularly information of fans' characteristics to classify them.

The first page had three questions. Respondents' age and sex were asked. Indeed, the last question on first page asked if the respondent attended Finnish football games. Those respondents who didn't attend were instantly directed to the last page in the survey to explain obstacles/drivers in game-attendance. The reason for asking no further questions were that other questions concerned respondent's relation to a certain club. If such relation did not exist, answering would have been irrelevant. Indeed, this study focused only on such persons who can be regarded somehow as customers of live team sport products. Therefore no more answers were required from non-attendants of football games.

For other respondents, who followed Finnish football games, questions on second page concerned their background, favorite team and game-attendance behavior. They were asked to connect answers to their favorite team and if no "favorite team" existed, they were asked to connect answers to the team, whose games they visited most often. When this study later discusses about "someone's team", it refers to this connection. Based on results the respondents were divided to fan segments.

The second goal was to explore how the five SPEED facets were valued among the sample group. Ten questions on third and fourth page (five questions each page) examined these facets. As previously mentioned, two additional questions (one question each page) addressed respondents' attitudinal team loyalty. These two questions asked if they considered themselves as loyal fans and how important supporting the team in games was for them. Together this part consisted of 12 questions (six questions each page). Respondents gave answers on five-level Likert rating-scale.

Between these pages there were some differences how the questions were presented. In third page respondents were asked to choose closest option to certain statements. The answering options were strongly disagree – somehow disagree – don't know – somehow agree – strongly agree. In the fourth page respondents were asked to evaluate how important certain features in games were for them. The options were not important at all – little important – somehow important – pretty important – really important.

Beaton et al. (2009) created 10-item questionnaire to measure SPEED facets' ability to explain game-attendance in their study, where each facet was tested with two items. Their questionnaire was used as a basis here. Basically those then items, with few modifications, were used in this survey. The questions were created so that they measured the original item. So, one question on page three and one question on page four explored particular facet's item. A couple of modifications had to be made to the questions so that they matched even better this particular study. First, the survey was carried out in Finnish, and naturally due to the language differences questions can't be assessed totally in the same form. Second, the original items in esteem-facet highlight purely the role of winning. In this questionnaire other esteem-item tested respondent's identification with team's performance. As argued in previous chapters, success is not the only feature explaining customer's commitment and esteem. Living, experiencing and attaching emotions to team's all performances, good and bad, have an impact as well. (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008)(Groeppel-Klein, Koenigstorfer & Schmitt, 2010).Therefore one esteem-question was modified so that it paid attention to all such features. The original 10 SPEED-items and the questions which studied those items are presented in following table:

FACET	Beaton et al.'s original items	Question/statement in the questionnaire to study the item	placed on page
Socialization	The chance to socialize with others	Meeting friends in games is important	3
	The opportunity to interact with other people	Opportunity to meet others	4
Performance	The gracefulness associated with the game	I visit games to see good performances	3
	The natural elegance of the game	Players' good performances	4
Excitement	I enjoy the excitement associated with the games	Watching a game is exciting	3
	I find the games very exciting	Exciting episodes on-field	4
Esteem	I feel like I have won when the team wins	In games I live with team's performances	3
	I get a sense of accomplishment when team wins	Team's victory	4
Diversion	I can get away from the tension in my life	During game I'm not thinking my life duties	3
	It provides me with a break from my daily routines	A break from everyday life	4

List 3: SPEED items (Beaton et al., 2009) and method to study them

Third goal in the survey was to provide ideas and insight for customer relation development in team sport business. Last two pages in the questionnaire consisted of three optional open-ended questions. These questions asked how game-events could be developed, how respondents would enhance their relation with the club, and about the typical obstacles/drivers for game-attendance. Indeed, respondents were given chance to give feedback of the survey. Answering was not mandatory. If respondents answered to first and second parts, those results were already usable in the analysis of first and second part. Open-ended questions are typically more time-consuming. Therefore respondents were given chance not to answer these questions and if they didn't, their contribution was only missing in this third relation development part.

### 6.3. Results

The questionnaire was available for three days. During this period circa 1000 visits were made to the topic, and 293 people responded to the questionnaire. From these 293 only one unit was excluded from the analysis due to irrational and dummy answers. In one other case the answers on page 4 had not been saved appropriately, and therefore his answers were not included in the SPEED analysis, which required that information. Only 100 drop outs existed who had opened the link, but didn't in the end complete questionnaire. These answering rates were pleasing. The final sample size of 292 for analysis can be considered as adequate for the purpose of this study. Of these 292 respondents only 4 were female. Two respondents didn't attend Finnish football games and therefore gave answers only to questions on first and last pages.

### 6.3.1. Respondents' characteristics and classification

Of the 290 respondents, who visited Finnish football games, 201 were originally from the city where their team was located and 89 were from elsewhere. Other answers given on first two pages are presented in following tables.

Age	Frequency	Percent
< 15	4	1,4
15 - 24	166	56,8
25 - 34	102	34,9
35 - 50	20	6,8
Total	292	100,0

None was over 50

Population	Frequency	Percent
< 20k	19	6,6
20k - 50k	33	11,4
50k - 100k	66	22,8
> 100k	172	59,3
Total	290	100,0

Level	Frequency	Percent
League	182	62,8
1st	44	15,2
2nd	46	15,9
Other	18	6,2
Total	290	100,0

Years	Frequency	Percent
0 - 2	39	13,4
3 - 5	89	30,7
6 - 9	66	22,8
10 -	96	33,1
Total	290	100,0

Games	Frequency	Percent
1 - 2	18	6,2
3 - 5	52	17,9
6 - 9	64	22,1
10 -	156	53,8
Total	290	100,0

None visited no games at all

Games	Frequency	Percent
0	70	24,1
1 - 3	132	45,5
4 -	88	30,3
Total	290	100,0

Games	Frequency	Percent
0	35	12,1
1 - 3	85	29,3
4 - 9	63	21,7
10 - 20	61	21,0
> 20	46	15,9
Total	290	100,0

Tables 3: Survey stats in background questions

Some findings in respondents' background could be brought up. Quite significant feature among them was relatively young age. Most respondents were young adults; 91.7% were aged between 15 and 34. The results showed that survey reached very active football followers. More than half of them visited ten or more home games in a season. Most of the respondents followed teams playing in Veikkausliiga.

Respondents were asked how many home games they typically attended during season. Of the 290 respondents only 70 attended five or less home games in a season. These respondents were considered as casuals. This limit of five home games was chosen, because it was consistent with Tapp's classification basis. Indeed, Finnish league season has consisted of 13 home games in recent years. If games in Cup or European competitions are taken into account the number of games may exceed 20. Anyway, visiting 5 games or less can be regarded as casual behavior. However, nine persons were excluded. In these cases respondents attended ten or more games, in which their team was not involved. Such behavior was regarded more active than casual. These persons were classified as repertoire fans. The final number of casuals was 61. Besides visiting five or less home games they visited less than ten games, which didn't involve their teams. The final group of casuals in rating scale analysis was 60 respondents, because one casual respondent had missing values on page four. Casual fans were divided into committed and carefree based on how loyal they regarded themselves. If they agreed totally or partly to the question are you team's loyal fan, they were considered as committed. This division left 20 carefree and 40 committed casuals.

Fans attending more than five home games were then classified either as fanatics or as repertoire fans. Dividing this group based on their attachment to the team was little difficult. From the remaining 220 respondents 158 agreed totally and additional 49 agreed partly when asked if they were loyal fans of their teams. 13 leftover respondents were automatically regarded as repertoire fans because of the lack of team attachment. After the exclusion 207 respondents were left. Before survey more obvious diversion was expected in team loyalty. Now as that significant part considered themselves as loyal fans, the division couldn't rely on it. So their classification into repertoire fans and fanatics was made according to their attendance in games, in which their teams were not included. As Tapp (2004) presented most significant difference between these classes was being attached either to the club or to the sport. Although this division is not perfect, it was most usable in this situation. If respondents attended less than 10 such games, they were regarded as fanatics. 113 such cases existed. The remaining 94, who attended 10 or more games without their teams' participation were then classified as repertoire fans. After these classifications the total number of different fans for later analysis was 20 carefree casuals, 40 committed casuals, 116 repertoire fans and 113 fanatics.

Fan types

	Frequency	Percent
Carefree	20	6,9
Committed	40	13,8
Repertoire	116	40,1
Fanatics	113	39,1
Total	289	100,0

Table 4: Classification and frequencies

Cross-tabulation provided some additional insight relating to fan classes' characteristics. Obviously cross-tabulation was useless in questions, which had been used in classification. Still, regarding the length of fan relation and respondent's origins cross-tabulation gave good insight.

		Fan types				Total
		Carefree	Committed	Repertoire	Fanatic	
Originally from your team's city?	Yes	50,0 %	55,0 %	72,4 %	75,2 %	69,6 %
	No	50,0 %	45,0 %	27,6 %	24,8 %	30,4 %

		Fan type				Total
Years		Carefree	Committed	Repertoire	Fanatic	
How long you've visited team's games?	0 - 2	35,0 %	30,0 %	6,9 %	10,6 %	13,5 %
	3 - 5	35,0 %	27,5 %	25,9 %	36,3 %	30,8 %
	6 - 9	10,0 %	12,5 %	26,7 %	24,8 %	22,8 %
	10 -	20,0 %	30,0 %	40,5 %	28,3 %	32,9 %

		Fan type				Total
		Carefree	Committed	Repertoire	Fanatic	
Team's playing level	League	70,0 %	72,5 %	57,8 %	62,8 %	62,6 %
	1st	10,0 %	15,0 %	11,2 %	20,4 %	15,2 %
	2nd	15,0 %	10,0 %	19,8 %	14,2 %	15,9 %
	Other	5,0 %	2,5 %	11,2 %	2,7 %	6,2 %

Tables 5: Respondents' origin, the length of fan relation and team's level cross-tabulated with fan classes

First of all more active fans, repertoires and fanatics, had clearly more often their roots in the city where their teams were located. Indeed, these same classes had been attending games longer. Especially repertoires stood out as the most long-lasting customer group. Casuals were more likely to follow league teams compared to repertoires and fanatics, who showed more interest on lower level teams. Fan type was also cross-tabulated with respondents' age and team's city size, but these results didn't show notable differences. The cross-tabulation findings gave support to the

theory review concerning that loyal sport customers have typically established their fan relation earlier. Indeed, as was expected, casual fans had more often moved to club's district elsewhere.

### 6.3.2. Answers in SPEED-questions

The next stage of analysis concerns questionnaire's Likert scale-questions, which were presented on pages three and four. The comparison of fan classes' means in the 10 SPEED and two loyalty question were following.

Fan type	How you evaluate following statements?							How important following features in games are for you?						SPEED items' total mean
	I'm loyal fan of my team	Meeting friends in games is important	I visit games to see good sport performances	Watching a game is exciting	In games I live with team's performances	During games I'm not thinking my life duties	Support my own team	Opportunity to meet others	Players' good performances	Exciting episodes on-field	Team's victory	A break from everyday life		
Carefree	Mean Std. D.	1,95 ,605	2,70 1,455	3,80 1,005	3,70 1,031	3,35 ,988	3,80 1,056	2,85 ,933	2,75 1,209	3,85 ,933	4,15 ,813	3,70 1,081	3,55 ,945	3,54
Committed	Mean Std. D.	4,35 ,483	3,03 1,291	3,68 1,207	4,55 ,677	4,43 ,594	4,25 ,870	3,85 1,027	3,05 1,218	3,73 ,987	4,08 ,859	3,78 1,097	3,58 1,083	3,81
Repertoire	Mean Std. D.	4,45 1,024	4,00 1,157	3,82 1,001	4,61 ,755	4,38 ,957	4,42 ,934	4,00 1,004	3,74 1,088	3,77 ,868	4,04 ,927	3,97 1,012	3,85 1,032	4,06
Fanatic	Mean Std. D.	4,71 ,457	3,65 1,239	3,70 1,117	4,78 ,417	4,65 ,566	4,50 ,781	4,35 ,844	3,34 1,162	3,69 ,867	4,07 ,821	4,28 ,840	3,86 ,925	4,05
Total	Mean Std. D.	4,36 1,005	3,64 1,289	3,75 1,074	4,61 ,705	4,42 ,838	4,38 ,890	4,04 1,011	3,42 1,179	3,74 ,886	4,07 ,866	4,04 ,983	3,80 ,995	3,99

Table 6: Mean scores and standard deviations of fan classes (survey questions translated from Finnish)

As discussed on page 51, six different items were surveyed at this point. Each item was explored with two questions. In first questions respondents agreed/disagreed certain statements. In second questions respondents rated the importance of specific game features. Answers in both questions were given on a scale of five. Although team loyalty item was used in the classification of fan, those scores are also shown in the table alongside with other rating questions. Obviously carefree fans scored lowest and fanatics highest in that feature. The combined mean of SPEED items are presented in the right end of the table. In general carefree fans gave clearly lowest rates in the questionnaire. The means with repertoires and fanatics were almost even and clearly highest. Committed casuals placed in between.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to test the differences in mean values (Birks & Malhotra, 2007, p. 546). The purpose was to identify if certain SPEED items were more dependent on fan classes than others. The variances between groups and within groups are compared. If between groups variance is obviously higher, it refers that the grouping factor (fan class) has an impact on the outcome (SPEED item). If the related p-value is low (Sig. in table), it expresses that fan class has an influence on SPEED item. The results of analysis were following.

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Meeting friends in games is important	Between G.	47,836	3	15,945	10,543	,000
	Within G.	431,016	285	1,512		
	Total	478,851	288			
I visit games to see good performances	Between G.	1,119	3	,373	,321	,810
	Within G.	330,943	285	1,161		
	Total	332,062	288			
Watching a game is exciting	Between G.	19,919	3	6,640	15,371	,000
	Within G.	123,112	285	,432		
	Total	143,031	288			
In games I live with team's performances	Between G.	28,863	3	9,621	15,806	,000
	Within G.	173,476	285	,609		
	Total	202,339	288			
During game I'm not thinking my life duties	Between G.	9,117	3	3,039	3,950	,009
	Within G.	219,250	285	,769		
	Total	228,367	288			
Opportunity to meet others	Between G.	27,226	3	9,075	6,932	,000
	Within G.	373,113	285	1,309		
	Total	400,339	288			
Players' good performances	Between G.	,614	3	,205	,259	,855
	Within G.	225,400	285	,791		
	Total	226,014	288			
Exciting episodes on-field	Between G.	,208	3	,069	,092	,965
	Within G.	215,543	285	,756		
	Total	215,751	288			
Team's victory	Between G.	12,440	3	4,147	4,443	,005
	Within G.	265,975	285	,933		
	Total	278,415	288			
A break from everyday life	Between G.	3,987	3	1,329	1,348	,259
	Within G.	280,968	285	,986		
	Total	284,955	288			

Table 7: ANOVA of SPEED items

The results suggested that the fan class had no significant impact in four SPEED items. Both items in performance facet had no differences between fan classes. One item in excitement facet “exciting on-field episodes” and one diversion item “a break from everyday life” neither found differences between classes.

Quite naturally the performance on-field is very central element in spectator sport. Its essential role was also acknowledged in the theory review. Therefore it’s not that surprising that differences between groups were not significant. All rated this facet quite equally. The comparison of classes’

means shows that carefree casuals still rated this facet relatively highest, because they rated almost every other facet lower than other fan classes. The game itself seems to explain their attendance-motivation well.

The comparison of means and ANOVA in social item gave support that differences between groups existed. Little surprisingly repertoire fans valued it highest. It was expected that for fanatics this social aspect would have been more important, because of their interest to be part of club's community, club culture and sharing emotions with other fans. In general repertoires valued relatively high all items. Considering that they also are very active attendants it is reasonable to state that football is part of their lifestyle. Probably many of their friends share the same passion, and therefore social facet is valued that highly.

The results in esteem facet were quite expected. Fanatics valued these items highest, followed by repertoire fans in second, committed casuals in third, and last carefree casuals. Perhaps most interesting finding was that repertoire fans rated the facet higher than committed casuals. Possible explanation might be that repertoire fans are just heavier consumers of sport products. Therefore their bonds to the team and football in general might be deeper. Different situational constraints typically prevent committed casuals from more active participation. Consequently the identification with the club might be lighter.

Diversion facet was given higher scores by more active classes. They were followed by committed casuals and, as usual, carefree casuals gave lowest scores. Theory part suggested that this item would have been central for committed casuals. Unfortunately this group was not that well represented. Excitement facet was valued quite equally between groups. Considering carefree casuals' low scores in general, it was notable that they valued other excitement item highest compared to other classes.

### 6.3.3. Open-ended answers concerning relation enhancement

Regarding survey's third goal the respondent gave answers to open-ended questions concerning customer relation enhancement. First question asked how game-events could be developed. Second how respondents would enhance their relation with the club. The third and last question asked which were typical obstacles and drivers for game-attendance. The number of answers in these questions was pleasing. First question received 161, second 122 and third 187 answers.

Indeed, more than 100 took the chance to give feedback of the questionnaire. Next examples of each fan class present which features were often mentioned in their answers.

#### Carefree

1. *Better stadium facilities. Quality and more professional organizing in events.*
2. *I don't feel passionate attachment to my team. More obvious identity could help.*
3. *Own laziness and lack of time typically prevent. Colorful player/opponents could increase attendance.*

#### Committed

1. *The creation of atmosphere and fan culture should be supported. Decent services.*
2. *I should visit games more often. Club should be more visible in community.*
3. *Distance, I live in elsewhere now. Other duties like job or family. I would attend more often if I could.*

#### Repertoire fan

1. *Naturally the central focus must be in the game. Peripheral services could develop and be quicker though.*
2. *Active communication. Gatherings/meeting should be organized more often.*
3. *I visit games if I just can. Stable game-days and schedule would be nice. Hobbies, work, etc. might prevent.*

#### Fanatic

1. *Focus on the game, it's the main issue. Serving level is currently quite weak.*
2. *Better communication. Club could organize more gathering and chances to participate.*
3. *Stable game-days and schedule could enhance participation. Varying other duties and activities are obstacles.*

One typical request in answers was lower prices and better serving with beer. Obviously the age and sex among respondents might have impacted this finding. Legislation in Finland also sets limits for serving alcohol drinks. Still, clubs can consider providing drinking-sections and locating them wisely. Such improvements could generate more revenues for clubs.

#### 6.4. Analysis of survey

Beaton et al. (2009) tested SPEED facets' ability to explain game attendance. The purpose in this survey was to test if some facets explain better the behavior of identified customer classes. Based on survey results some generalizations can be made.

*Performance* facet seems to affect equally to all sport fans. It was expected that repertoire fans would have valued it highest, but as the core product in team sport is game on-field, its central role for all is not that exceptional. *Social* facet had most significant impact on repertoire fans' behavior. Theory review suggested that for carefree casuals this aspect in games would have been more significant. However, football seems to be big part of repertoire fans life. They attend games often no matter who is playing. So possibly their friendships might often be related to sport, and therefore this element is also regarded important. *Esteem* clearly was significant factor for fanatics. They are attached to particular team, whose performances are followed closely. The team is part of their identity. The field research gave additional support to what was expected before. *Excitement* facet was regarded relatively high among carefree casuals. They valued other excitement item highest, which is relatively significant since this group gave low scores to almost everything. Indeed, no other facet really came up with them, so it's reasonable to consider excitement in games important for this group. *Diversion's* role as important feature for committed casuals was not really highlighted in survey results. Unfortunately this class was perhaps not that well represented in the survey as it could have been. However, the theory review gave quite strong evidence for diversion's significance among committed casuals. Taking into consideration these points, this study regards diversion as important feature for them.

Survey showed that the characteristics with repertoire fans and fanatics were really close to each other. The comparison of SPEED items showed some differences, but the views and hopes presented in open-ended questions were really consistent. The appreciation and attachment to the game played on-field reflected in their answers. Their desire is to follow the sport. Wishes to develop club's communication and gatherings were often presented, which highlights the role of inclusion. Regardless is the fan attached to the team or to the sport, clubs should provide effective communication channels for fans. This supports inclusion's role as relation driver among active fan classes. Some of the respondents asked for apparent club-related or even club-owned bar. Such venue could enhance club-culture and unity among fans. Additionally, many respondents wished

more stability in game-days and schedules. Such decisions are obviously made on league level, but so clear hopes should be considered in future.

The development in service-scape was discussed by all fan classes, but carefree fans mentioned it particularly. This didn't surprise. They are not that committed to the sport or to the team and other aspects in the experience might be regarded more important. The committed casuals hoped in their answers stronger presence of club-culture. Often this class also noted their place of residence as the reason for their relatively low game-attendance. They lived elsewhere. This finding is somehow consistent with previous arguments that committed casuals typically lived in complicated situations. Family, work and other busies were actually mentioned quite equally among all respondents. Basically, people have also other content in their lives than football.

Interesting was that the casual fans brought up that stronger club identity would help clubs to be more appealing. Hypothesis was that this element would have been more crucial with repertoires and fanatics, but perhaps clubs' presence and identity are more obvious for them due to following the sport more closely. Although in general the respondents didn't highlight too much the role of club-culture and -identity, it is definitely one important feature which should be considered in club management. Referring to theory review, strong culture helps clubs to overcome weaker seasons. Fans are loyal for the sake of being part of the club culture, not because of success. Shared values, identity and culture should be highlighted for creating stable relations between club and fans. Clubs should stay loyal for their origins, which is the reason why their fans started supporting them in first place. Culture should exist somehow in club's all operations.

## 6.5. Limitations

There are advantages and disadvantages in each method. The survey could be criticized for reaching too similar types of sport customers. The group of respondents could have been more wide-ranging. Relatively small share of casual respondents were reached, which was little disappointing. If questionnaire-link had been placed on front-page the relative share of casual respondents could have been higher. As the questionnaire was placed on topic in football culture section, it probably reached more active readers. The visitors also self-selected if they filled questionnaire or not. Persons who considered the topic relevant (active fans) were more likely to answer. This risk, which was identified before survey, came true. Possibly more comprehensive sample could have been collected by asking people to fill questionnaire in a game event.

Respondents were also pretty young, and naturally wider range of different age groups would have been welcome. Low number of women respondents was also weakness.

Still, questionnaire was now carried out very effectively. It avoided no-response errors, and the quality of data was high. The questionnaire was given positive feedback from the respondents for being concise. Good number of results was collected compared to how many topic-visits were made. In the end, the survey reached desired respondents. The goal was finding team sport customers, which surely was achieved with this survey method. Collected data was appropriate for testing study's theory and framework, and contributions to sport business research were made.

The survey findings provided support for prior theoretical discussion and framework, but still gave some new insight regarding the attributes in identified fan classes. Especially this research gave good information of the most active fan classes, repertoires and fanatics, who were well represented. If this specific research would continue, more emphasis would be given to the two less active classes, carefree and committed casuals. They are lighter users of team sport products, but exploring them would give valuable perspective for customer relation management. Corresponding survey could be carried out in some other location in order to reach bigger and more versatile sample. Indeed more insight from women is needed.

The academic research in team sport business is relatively little. This was one contribution to find more insight about the enhancement of consumer customer relations in this relatively small academic field. More research is needed.

## 7. Conclusions

This study acknowledged key features in team sport products. The core product, game, is inconsistent and surrounded by different peripheral services and offerings (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007). Indeed, from marketer's point of view managing the core product is challenging, often almost impossible (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007) (Alaja, 2000). The product is also affected by various external sources. Head organizations, league organizations and clubs jointly impact to the conditions how team sport is produced to guarantee the whole league product's quality (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004). From business perspective other clubs should be regarded as partners not as competitors. Often the customers don't even consider attending other teams' games. (Lonsdale, 2004) (Brownlee et al., 2008). In addition, clubs' B2C and B2B customers have their own interests, which must be taken into consideration while planning operations.

Today increasing amount of team sport clubs operate as companies. In business operations, the most central target market is the most valuable customers. In sport context, the commercial growth is driven by public interest. Therefore paying attention to consumer customer relations should be in great importance in clubs' operations (Kim & Trail, 2011). Sport fans have varying motivations to attend sport events. Fans' characteristic in sport context is extreme loyalty (O'Dwyer & Richardson, 2003). Loyal fans provide flexibility for sport organizations, and incomes are not that dependent on team's success.

Relying on success in marketing efforts should be avoided. Providing other values than success for fans is central. Aiming for strong club culture would foster fans' attachment. They often value non-product related attributes higher than product-related (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). Stronger and more stable club cultures, identities, values, traditions, etc. are needed together with long-term focus. Stronger customer relations help clubs in balancing through difficult periods. The profitability concerns are apparent in team sport business. Enhancing bonds with loyal fans and customers, who want to stand by the club, is insurance for sustainability through good and bad (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008) (Hardy, Mullin & Sutton, 2007). The key to more balanced club management is long-term focus and lasting customer relations. Sport organizations should try to move customers' emphasis from on-field performance to team identification (Bauer, Exler & Stokburger-Sauer, 2008). It was also acknowledged that the fan relations in sport context start already in the early stages of people's lives (O'Dwyer & Richardson, 2003). Clubs could consider if

they can provide program for kids/youngsters. Organizing football schools or players visits in schools are examples how clubs could try to foster bonds, and even get good publicity.

In customer relation enhancement Gladden's (2001) guidelines can be used. Naturally all companies, also in sport business, have to understand their customers and their drivers. Indeed, interaction between clubs and fans enhances relations. Loyalty has to be rewarded and club's core values should be present in communication. (Gladden, Irwin & Sutton, 2001). Providing effective communication channels and possibilities to interact is one central topic in sport customers' management (Dale et al., 2005).

### Theoretical Implications

The study identified four fan classes: *carefree casuals* (seeking entertainment in games), *committed casuals* (loyal to team, but not able to attend often), *repertoire fans* (passionate followers of particular sport) and *fanatics* (passionate follower of certain team). SPEED facets' role in explaining these classes' game-attendance behavior was discussed, and some generalizations were made. *Socialization* was considered particularly relevant with repertoire fans. *Performance* facet was regarded equally important among all. Fanatics valued *esteem* highly. *Excitement* was identified as relatively important feature with carefree casuals. Additionally, the role of *diversion* was regarded particularly important with committed casuals. Compared to previous research some new features particularly among repertoire fans were identified. Instead of just appreciating the chance to see quality sport, they valued social aspects in their sport customer relation highly. Some suggestions for customer relation enhancement were made. Active fans' hoped clubs to use more *inclusive strategies*. Indeed, better *service-level* and more *stable game-schedules* were desired. The study also acknowledged *club culture's* central role in developing customer relations in long term.

The study made a contribution to the still quite narrow team sport business research, and acquired information of team sport fans in Finland. It identified basis for fans' classification, identified features explaining fans' game-attendance behavior and provided ideas for customer relation enhancement in team sport business.

## Managerial Implications

Team sport industry has evolved quickly in the last couple of decades and continues to grow. In Finland the team sport business is not performing particularly well, and most team sport companies are making losses. Compared to other European countries the industry still owns significant growth potential. More sustainable business operations and better business expertise are clearly needed.

The research suggests that inclusion is particularly important element in relation management among more active fan classes. Additionally, decent level in game-related services should be provided. One of the most central conclusions in the study is the importance of building strong clubs cultures to enhance customer relations, to create sustainable business and to provide flexibility. Being successful can't be the only goal. Clubs have to be loyal for their basic values, which have activated their fans' interest in the first place.

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# Appendix

## Field survey

### Kannattajatutkimus

Vastaa kyselyyn! Mitä asioita arvostat jalkapallon seuraamisessa? Vastaaminen vie aikaasi vain muutamia minutteja.

Kysely on osa Aalto Yliopiston opiskelijan gradu-tutkielmaa, joka käsittelee urheiluseurojen asiakassuhteiden ja liiketoiminnan kehittämistä.

#### 1. Sukupuoli \*

- Mies
- Nainen

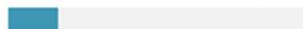
#### 2. Ikä \*

- alle 15
- 15-24
- 25-34
- 35-50
- yli 50

#### 3. Seuraatko suomalaisia jalkapallo-otteluita? \*

- Kyllä
- En (hyppää kysymykseen 15)

(Sivu 1 / 6)



Seuraava -->

## Kannattajatutkimus

Kysely koskee suomalaista seurajoukkuejalkapalloilua. Sanalla joukkue viitataan suosikkijoukkueeseen. Jos sinulla ei ole suosikkijoukkuetta, yhdistä vastauksesi siihen joukkueeseen, jonka peleissä käyt eniten.

4. Kuinka monta asukasta joukkueesi kotipaikkakunnalla on? \*

- alle 20000
- 20000-50000
- 50000-100000
- yli 100000

5. Oletko itse kotoisin samalta paikkakunnalta kuin joukkueesi? \*

- Kyllä
- En

6. Joukkueesi sarjataso? \*

- Liiga
- Ykkönen
- Kakkonen
- Muu

7. Kuinka monta vuotta olet käynyt joukkueesi otteluissa? \*

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-9
- 10 tai enemmän

**8. Kuinka monessa joukkueesi kotipelissä käyt yleensä kauden aikana? \***

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-9
- 10 tai enemmän

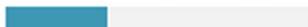
**9. Kuinka monessa joukkueesi vieraspeleissä käyt yleensä kauden aikana? \***

- 0
- 1-3
- 4 tai enemmän

**10. Kuinka monessa pelissä kävit viime vuonna, jossa joukkueesi ei ollut mukana? \***

- 0
- 1-3
- 4-9
- 10-20
- yli 20

(Sivu 2 / 6)



[<-- Edellinen](#)

[Seuraava -->](#)

11. Valitse kohdallasi sopivin vastausvaihtoehto. \*

	täysin eri mieltä	jokseenkin eri mieltä	en osaa sanoa	jokseenkin samaa mieltä	täysin samaa mieltä
Olen joukkueeni uskollinen kannattaja *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tuttujen tapaaminen otteluissa on minulle tärkeää *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tulen otteluihin katsomaan hienoja peliesityksiä *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pelin seuraaminen on jännittävää jännittävää *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Elän pelissä joukkueeni suoritusten mukana *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pelin aikana en ajattele elämäni kiireitä/velvoitteita *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(Sivu 3 / 6)

<-- Edellinen

Seuraava -->

12. Miten tärkeitä seuraavat asiat ovat sinulle peleissä? Valitse sopivin vaihtoehto. \*

	ei ollenkaan tärkeää	vähän tärkeää	jonkun verran tärkeää	melko tärkeää	todella tärkeää
Oman joukkueen kannustaminen *	<input type="radio"/>				
Mahdollisuus tavata muita *	<input type="radio"/>				
Pelaajien hyvät suoritukset *	<input type="radio"/>				
Jännittävät / viihdyttävät tapahtumat kentällä *	<input type="radio"/>				
Joukkueen voitto *	<input type="radio"/>				
Tauko arkirutiineista *	<input type="radio"/>				

(Sivu 4 / 6)

<-- Edellinen

Seuraava -->

## Kannattajatutkimus

13. Miten kehittäisit ottelutapahtumia?

14. Miten parantaisit sinun ja joukkueesi välistä suhdetta?

(Sivu 5 / 6)



<-- Edellinen

Seuraava -->

## Kannattajatutkimus

15. Mitkä asiat yleensä estävät sinun peleissä käymisen? Mitä asioita parantamalla kävisit peleissä useammin?

16. Lopuksi voit antaa palautetta kyselystä

(Sivu 6 / 6)

<-- Edellinen

Lähetä