

Saluting class and deciding future

More than 130 guests were on hand for the IV Fenix Outdoor & Warrior European Hockey Awards in Prague on 11 June - and the room was full for the E.H.C. Alliance Annual General Meeting on the following day. The Awards Dinner displayed European club hockey excellence for 2019, while the AGM provided the Alliance and its board with a clear roadmap for the future.

The annual E.H.C. Awards Dinner at the Hotel Diplomat in Prague has come a long way in three years. From humble beginnings in 2017, to a real gala show in 2019. E.H.C. Vice-President **Håkan Loob** thanked **Martin Axelhed** from Fenix Outdoor and **Matthias Wolf** and **Stuart Proud** of Warrior Hockey for their steadfast support of the European Hockey Clubs.

It was Martin Axelhed who drew the loudest applause of the evening when he at the end of his opening speech announced that Fenix Outdoor will extend their agreement with the E.H.C. for another three-year period.

The 2019 Awards winners were:

Globetrotter Coach of the Year: Roger Rönnerberg, Frölunda Fjällräven Young Player of the Year: Alekski Heponiemi, Kärpät Hanwag Club of the Year: Frölunda Indians
Warrior Career Excellence Award: Michael Wolf, RB Munich



FINAL FOUR: Award winners. Roger Rönnerberg (Coach), Michael Wolf (Warrior), Alekski Heponiemi (Young Player), Christian Lechtaler, on behalf of Frölunda (Club of the Year). Photo: Jan Benes

Prior to the official Awards part of the evening, Managing Director **Szymon Szemberg** welcomed the four new E.H.C. member clubs, Belfast Giants (GBR), Grenoble (FRA), Fehervar AV19 (HUN) and Graz 99ers (AUT) to our family.

On Wednesday morning, **Håkan Loob** opened the proceedings of the fourth Annual General Meeting. The Vice-President and the conceptual father of the E.H.C. said in his speech that the alliance has come a long way in since the first meeting in March 2015, with 85 member club from 16 countries, two gatherings per season with the Awards and AGM in June and the very appreciated E.H.C. Hockey Business Forum in autumn and a good dialogue with the IIHF and a close cooperation with Hockey Europe, the union of leagues.

“But we have also come to a point where the next step is needed,” said Loob and pointed out that we now have three years until to prepare an integration of leagues and clubs into the governance of the IIHF. Loob suggested that a task-force is put together with the sole objective to prepare this new stakeholder inclusion to the IIHF and consequently adjust the IIHF statutes.

Two executives from member clubs added to **Håkan Loob**’s speech and his vision:

Peter Zahner (ZSC Lions, SUI) agreed that E.H.C. has good relationships with clubs, IIHF and also with leagues, but that the institutional relationship to the IIHF must be upgraded. “We are a very good discussion partner, but in the future, we’d like to be a partner in the decisions. The clubs should be entitled to take part in the formal decision-making progress of the IIHF.”

Kaarel Lehiste (Djurgården, SWE) said that a formal structure where decisions regarding professional hockey are made is needed, with the participation of the clubs. He urged the EHC board to draft a

3-year plan for an integration of clubs into the IIHF governance by 2022. He said that such a plan should include a proposal to establish a European Ice Hockey Federation, specifically designed to look after the interests of European professional ice hockey.

Szymon Szemberg informed about the results of club survey about the most important areas for clubs going forward. (More than 50% of clubs responded to the survey which included 11 areas). Importance of each issue was graded 1 to 5. These are the six most important issues:

1. Insurance and release of player to national teams	4.52
2. Compensation for players in IIHF events	4.36
3. Transparency into IIHF finances	4.34
4. Influence in international calendar	4.22
5. Player transfers to North America (NHL)	4.14
6. Inclusion of clubs, leagues as IIHF stakeholder	4.10

Szemberg pointed out that although it is understandable that “hard” issues like insurance, release of players to national teams and financial compensation are the most important, all these things will be difficult to achieve if point 6 is not reached – that clubs and leagues have a formal voice and vote in the governance of the IIHF.

IIHF General Secretary **Horst Lichtner** followed by reporting about the Professional European Hockey Round Table (P.E.H.R.T.) and its European Ice Hockey SWOT analysis conducted by PwC and also about the IIHF’s decision to play future top level World Championship events on small ice (60 x 26).

As part of P.E.H.R.T, **Jörgen Lindgren** (Hockey Europe) reported on the issue of insurance and release of players on national team duty. Progress is made and key message was that clubs will not be obligated to release players to national teams, unless the players are fully insured by their respective national associations.