

Celebrating excellence in Prague

■ A perfect evening celebrating the winners of the Fenix Outdoor European Hockey Awards was followed by the 3rd E.H.C. Alliance General Meeting, which indicated that the clubs' direct influence into international hockey matters is a matter of time. It's no longer a question of "if", but rather of "when".



FINAL FOUR: All winners of the Fenix Outdoor European Hockey Awards were on site in Prague; From left, Christian Winkler, GM of Red Bull München, Hanwag Club of the Year; Riikka Väilä, Warrior Award; Fredrik Söderström, Globetrotter Coach of the Year and Elias Pettersson, Fjällräven Young Player of the Year. *Photo: Jan Benes*

Almost 130 guests gathered at the Diplomat Hotel on 12 June to acknowledge and celebrate the recipients of the

E.H.C. European Hockey Awards, this year expanded with the Warrior Awards, for career excellence, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey. Riikka Väilä of HV71 Jönköping and Team Finland became the first, and very popular winner of the award presented by Warrior Hockey. Especially appreciated was the video greeting to Riikka from Hayley Wickenheiser, arguably the best female player of all time.

■ Although many predicted that Växjö Lakers' forward Elias Pettersson was one of the favorites to the Fjällräven Young Player of the Year Award, the winners of the Globetrotter Coach of the Year and Hanwag Club of the Year Awards were themselves happily surprised. Both Christian Winkler (Red Bull München) and Fredrik Söderström (Storhamar) were outsiders for the awards where the competition was tough.

It was a wonderful ceremony where sometimes emotions took over in the thank-you speeches which even more added to the value of the celebration. A special Thank You to Martin Axelhed, CEO of Fjällräven and Matthias Wolf and Stuart Proud of Warrior Hockey who were on hand to present the winners with the awards. You can see highlight videos on <http://eurohockeyclubs.com/video>

■ E.H.C. General Meeting approved way forward

Although the IIHF Congress in Copenhagen voted against all relevant reforms which would include clubs and leagues into the IIHF governance (YES 0; NO 6) there was a spirit of optimism at the E.H.C. Annual General Meeting on the morning after the Awards Gala. Represented by the General Secretary Horst Lichtner and Council Member Franz Reindl, the IIHF emphasized that the dialogue between the world governing body and the clubs & leagues must and will continue. Lichtner and Reindl invited the E.H.C. and Hockey Europe to a meeting with the entire IIHF Council at their next meeting.

The stumbling block are the "small" IIHF member nations who have not been convinced that an inclusion of clubs and leagues into IIHF governance is something positive, rather they see this as a potential threat.

Horst Lichtner pointed out that any change to the IIHF's structure must include a clear message to the smaller hockey nations "what's-in-it-for-us".

The E.H.C. member clubs voted unanimously to continue the dialogue with the IIHF and they furthermore

showed their positive approach by also voting unanimously to support the IIHF's Partnership for Progress Program, where the focus is on development of the smaller nations and their clubs.

■ The member clubs approved financial report, the 2018-19 budget, including the annual membership fees which will stay unchanged at €2000. The E.H.C. Board received a vote of confidence from the meeting, including the change which will see Marc Lüthi and Håkan Loob be co-presidents, a pragmatic decision to broaden the leadership of the alliance.

■ Due to time restraints, the news about the Technology and Innovation Group was not presented in Prague. So here: In view of the rapid development on sports technology such as advanced stats and various forms of on-ice action "tracking", a special Technology and Innovation Group was put together with the objective to work as a binding body between the European leagues and to foster knowledge exchange.

The T&I group should become a specialist counterpart to support the leagues and its clubs to be better informed to do better decisions about sports technology innovations and centralize projects to reduce redundant work. The T&I is led by:

- Jörg von Ameln - DEL
- Philipp Bohnenblust - Swiss League
- Johan Ejermark - Everysport/SWE
- Thorsten Apel - SportContract

The E.H.C. will report about the activity of the Technology and Innovation Group in due time.

■ Welcome to Göteborg 5-6 October for the Development Clinic at Frölunda Youth Academy (Friday 5/10) and the E.H.C. Hockey Business Forum (Saturday 6/10). See more: <http://eurohockeyclubs.com/forum2018>