

Hockey League Breaks Out of Ex-Communist Zone With Finland Addition

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Russian-based KHL hockey league has scored its biggest PR coup since its inception five years ago with the addition of Finnish team Jokerit from next season.

The KHL spans 28 teams in eight countries for the 2013-14 season, but all of them come from ex-Communist states, making the Helsinki-based club's arrival the first time the league has crossed the old Iron Curtain.

Jokerit's move comes after a company headed by Russian billionaire Boris Rotenberg bought a 49 percent stake in the team and full ownership of its Hartwall Arena.

"We are extremely satisfied about this contract and pleased to conclude the long negotiations successfully [with the KHL]," Rotenberg said Wednesday according to the Jokerit website.

"Jokerit already has a fantastic organization, infrastructure and youth development program

which enable the club to successfully join the KHL."

"Jokerit has the possibility to become one of the most successful brands in the league both financially and on the ice."

Rotenberg is already a leading figure in Russian sport, where he is the president of the Dynamo Moscow football team. His brother Arkady, also a billionaire, is president of the Dynamo Moscow hockey club, the current KHL champion.

Jokerit has won the Finnish league six times and will boast one of the largest and most modern arenas in the KHL with the 13,349-capacity Hartwall, which has hosted world championship games for the last two years.

Both the team's fans and the Finnish top hockey league have protested the team's widely discussed withdrawal from the SM-Liiga. The SM-Liiga said in July that it must sign off on any switch. It is not clear if that provision has been met.

KHL president Alexander Medvedev has previously spoken of expanding the league across Europe as far as Britain. The KHL's attempts to expand into Poland and Italy have hit financial problems in recent years.

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