In hockey, there’s the Leafs and Rangers; football has the Chicago Bears and Green Bay Packers.

But when it comes to wife carrying, there’s deep-rooted enmity between Finland and Estonia.

“The rivalry is very hard,” said Veikko Tervonen, spokesman for the [Wife Carrying World Championships](http://www.eukonkanto.fi/en/) in Sonkajarvi, Finland.

No other country has ever claimed top prize at the tournament’s main event, in which a man carries a woman across a 253.5-metre track that includes a metre-deep “water obstacle,” and two 85-cm hurdles.

Sonkajarvi started hosting tournaments in 1992, but the (somewhat distressing) origins of the aptly-named sport stretch back to the 19th century.

According to a Finnish folk tale, a brigand named Herkko Rosvo-Ronkainen lived with a band of outlaws in the woods. Every so often, the bandit would creep into the nearby village to plunder supplies. For good measure, he’d also carry back the odd female resident. And thus a sport was born.

When the first wife carrying tournaments were held in Sonkajarvi in the early 1990s, competitors only came from Finland, Tervonen explained in an email. Soon afterwards, they invited participants from the Estonian city of Vaike Maria.

Tervonen said that because the prizes were so good — winners received TVs, home electronics and their wives’ weight in beer — “the Estonians started to take the competition more seriously.”

Between 1997 and 2009, when the sport expanded and starting taking participants from around the world, Finland was locked out of the top spot as Estonian couples Madis Uursong and Inga Klauso, and Margo Uursong and Sandra Kullas dominated the annual competition.

More recently, Finnish duo Taisto Miettenen and Kristiina Haapanen have brought the glory back to the sport’s birth-country, besting their Estonian rivals — and 2008 champions — Alar Voogla and Kristi Viltrop. This year, Miettenen and Happenen finished the course in 1 minute, 1.22 seconds.

Most participants don’t take it so seriously, said Tervonen. For them, the wife-carrying contest is about having a good time.

“Most couples come for fun … Never any anger or jealousy,” said Tervonen. “It’s a very hard, and very fun, contest.”