Corporate social marketing (CSM) refers to “a means whereby a corporation supports the development and/or implementation of a behavior change campaign intended to improve public health, safety, the environment, or community well-being” (Kotler & Lee, 2005, p.114). The major goal of CSM is to persuade individuals to perform socially beneficial behavior (Bloom, Hussein, & Szykman, 1997; Kotler & Lee, 2005). The recent adoption of CSM among professional sport organizations (hereafter called “PSO(s)”) is notable (Irwin, Irwin, Miller, Somes, & Richey, 2010; Sparvero, 2010). These organizations have implemented CSM initiatives in such areas as youth health and education, environmental protection, community involvement, and intercultural understanding. The examination of CSM by PSOs is significant since these organizations have the potential to serve as a particularly meaningful vehicle for promoting socially responsible ideas and behavior (Chalip, 2006; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). However, no comprehensive framework exists that explains the process of how CSM influences consumer voluntary behavior (Du, Sen, & Bhattacharya, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to address this gap and investigate the role of corporate credibility in understanding how PSOs influence consumer pro-environmental behavior through their CSM initiatives. The current research focused on corporate credibility based on previous research findings indicating that the credibility of a message source greatly influences the persuasiveness of its communication (Pornpitakpan, 2004). In addition, among various voluntary behaviors promoted by PSOs through their CSM initiatives, this study explicitly examined the promotion of pro-environmental behavior because of growing environmental concern in the sport management literature (Chalip, 2006; Hums, 2010; Thibault, 2009).

This study developed a theoretical model positing that consumers would formulate their perceptions regarding the credibility of a PSO on supporting environmental protection (“environmental credibility”) based on characteristics of the organization and the CSM initiative. Environmental credibility, in turn, was expected to influence consumer pro-environmental behavior measured by daily recycling involvement and recycling intentions during the PSO’s home games. The model further proposed that issue importance, or the extent to which environmental issues are personally important to a consumer, would negatively moderate the effect of environmental credibility on pro-environmental behavior. The hypotheses specified in this model are:

**H1:** General credibility has a positive effect on the environmental credibility of the PSO.

**H2:** Perceived CSR has a positive effect on the environmental credibility of the PSO.

**H3:** The perceived fit between the PSO and its support for environmental protection has a positive effect on its environmental credibility.

**H4:** The perceived effort exerted by the PSO on its CSM initiative has a positive effect on its environmental credibility.

**H5:** The perceived impact of the CSM initiative has a positive effect on the environmental credibility of the PSO.

**H6:** The environmental credibility of the PSO has a positive effect on pro-environmental behavior.

**H7:** Issue importance has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between environmental credibility and pro-environmental behavior.

To test these hypotheses, the study examined consumer evaluations of environmental initiatives operated by two PSOs in Philadelphia: the Philadelphia Eagles’ Go Green program and the Philadelphia Phillies’ Red Goes Green program. The sample of this study conveniently included 2,368 subscribers of a daily electronic sports newsletter distributed by a local newspaper. Of them, 138 responded to the survey on the Eagles Go Green program and 230 responded to the survey on the Phillies Red Goes Green program, resulting in the usable responses of 368 (15.5%). Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was employed to analyze the obtained data.

Goodness-of-fit indices suggested the adequate fit of the proposed structural model with the data ($\chi^2/df = 1179.34/509 = 2.32$, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .06). The results of individual path coefficients identified the statistical significance of general credibility ($b = .13$, $p = .04$), perceived CSR ($b = .21$, $p = .02$), perceived effort ($b = .52$, $p < .01$), and perceived impact ($b = .15$, $p < .01$), confirming H1, H2, H4, and H5. Contrary to H3, however, perceived fit was not the significant predictor of environmental credibility ($b = .08$, $p = .06$). With regard to the effect of environmental credibility, it had a significant positive effect on the two measures of pro-environmental behavior, daily recycling ($b = .22$, $p < .01$) and in-game recycling ($b = .42$, $p < .01$), in support of H6. Regarding the moderating effect of issue importance, the effect of the interaction variable (issue...
importance × environmental credibility) on daily recycling was found to be non-significant ($b = .05, p = .57$). In contrast, the interaction variable had a significant negative effect on in-game recycling ($b = -.30, p < .01$). This result suggests that environmental credibility had a weaker effect on in-game recycling for respondents who indicated higher issue importance (and vice versa), in line with the theoretical prediction. These findings collectively provided partial support for H7.

Overall, the results show that the two organizational characteristics, general credibility and perceived CSR, and the two CSM characteristics, perceived effort and perceived impact, are significant predictors of the environmental credibility of the PSO. In turn, enhanced environmental credibility enables the PSO to influence consumer pro-environmental behavior. Finally, environmental credibility has a greater effect on in-game recycling if consumers are less involved with environmental issues. In conclusion, the findings of this study contribute to the literature by highlighting the role of corporate credibility when PSOs engage in CSM. Moreover, this research, as well as future endeavors, should help PSOs become an effective vehicle for promoting socially beneficial behavior, which ideally can lead to positive social change.