Sport events have grown from their initial role of pure forms of entertainment to strategic tools utilized by cities to reap their assorted benefits. Sport events are becoming a tool for local and regional economic development (e.g., Green, 2001). Cities of all sizes start to compete to host different types of sporting events for their range of acclaimed beneficial impacts, from economic (e.g., Preuss, 2006), to social (e.g., Kellet, Hede & Chalip, 2008). However, previous research has indicated that proper leveraging strategies are essential to maximize positive (and minimize negative) impacts and outcomes of events; be it economic (e.g., Chalip & Leyns, 2002), touristic (e.g., O’Brian, 2007), social (e.g., Chalip, 2006), and/or sport participation (e.g., Weed, et al. 2012). O’Brien and Chalip (2008) noted that merely hosting an event is not enough; event organizers, local businesses, and other community stakeholders should take advantage of the opportunity to host these events in order to create sustainable long-term legacies. Chalip’s (2004) framework for host community event leverage identified four means for stimulating immediate economic activity: (1) entice visitor spending; (2) lengthen visitor stays; (3) retain event expenditures; and (4) use the event to enhance regional business relationships; and two means for longer-term leverage: (1) showcase event via advertising and reporting; and, (2) use the event in advertising and promotions. While large-scale sporting events draw large crowds and attract international media attention, they also have a significant number of negative impacts, especially from an economic perspective (e.g., Kesenne, 2012). Smaller scale sporting events have shown to provide greater economic benefits for medium-sized cities (e.g., Veltri, Miller, & Harris, 2009) since they utilize less public dollars than large events (e.g., Higham, 1999) and generally utilize existing infrastructure (e.g., Taks, 2013). In addition, smaller sized events are capable of generating a reliable flow of tourists (e.g. Gibson et al., 2012), where large or mega events’ sustainability for future tourism has been under much scrutiny (e.g., Smith, 2009). Generally, communities have the capacity to host small and medium sized events, which reduces the likelihood of potential disturbance and conflict. in the community (e.g., Balduck et al., 2011; Taks, 2013)). The focus on smaller scale sporting events is therefore warranted for identifying leveraging strategies to create sustainable benefits for host communities. The few studies that looked into event leveraging have focused on isolated events (e.g., Chalip & Leyns, 2002; O’Brien, 2007), and no efforts have been made to transfer knowledge on leveraging tactics and strategies from hosting an event in one year to the next, thereby creating a more sustainable leveraging framework. The purpose of this study is to identify and develop leveraging strategies for a medium sized event, with a specific focus on leveraging for economic purposes. The event under investigation is a provincial championship that was successfully hosted in 2013, and will be hosted again in April 2014. We specifically aim to detect and implement leveraging strategies for the 2014 event in order to construct a framework that can be carried over to the following year.

The city in which the event takes place is a medium sized city in Canada, located in a region that is struggling to recover from the recession. This city has put a high priority on hosting sporting events as a means to diversify the local economy. High investments have been made in new sport infrastructure, and substantial public funds have been allocated to hosting a series of sporting events in the next few years. However, multiple local sport organizations have already established a tradition of hosting a variety of sporting events which do not rely on public funding. These events are therefore probably more suitable to generate benefits for the host community. However, organizing committees of local clubs are often completely immersed in staging a successful event, rather than exploring leveraging strategies and tactics. Other community stakeholders (e.g., local businesses, local sport organizations) often overlook the opportunities to leverage these events to their benefits; perhaps, they simply lack the knowhow and the knowledge. It is fair to say that leveraging strategies are seldom on the radar screen. For instance, the local club that is organizing the 2014 event, successfully hosted this event in 2013 without utilizing any leveraging strategies; nor was any event leveraging undertaken by other businesses in the community.

The medium sized event is a provincial gymnastics championship, which is hosted over a three-day period. It is considered a prestigious event, as it draws upon the elite athletes in the province, vying for titles and the opportunity
to eventually compete at the national and international level. Approximately 800 participants from across the province are expected to compete in front of over 1000 spectators over the course of the event. The event is organized by a local gymnastics club in accordance to the governing sport body's rules and regulations, and requires no public dollars. The event staff consists of three full-time employees and 50 volunteers from within the club’s community. Direct income is generated through registration fees and spectator admissions, while costs include expenditures for prizing, equipment and facility rental. In 2013, the event made over $70,000 in profit, utilizing minimal business partnerships. Free advertising was offered with limited exposure to the surrounding region. In short, the event presents itself as offering great benefits for the host community since the costs associated with hosting this event are minimal. This provincial championship is exemplary of small to medium sized sporting events; since it is part of an annual cycle, it allows for knowledge development of leveraging opportunities that could be carried over from one year to the next, and could inform countless cities and businesses across North America.

All six methods provided by Chalip's (2004) framework will be explored and considered for opportunities within the context of the 2014 event under investigation. Special emphasis will be put on the efforts to build reciprocal relationships with local businesses, not only to create economic benefits at the time of the event, but to also create new business alliances (Olkkonen, 2001), with the potential to create more sustainable outcomes.

This study will provide community stakeholders (e.g., the city, local sport organizations, local businesses, and other local stakeholders) with a framework on how to leverage a medium sized event, in order to maximize positive and minimize negative outcomes for participants, spectators, and the host community. This study builds upon Ziakas’ (2010) idea that host communities should start thinking about developing event portfolios. This allows to transferring knowledge from one event to another, thereby creating opportunities for more sustainable outcomes, rather than creating short-term outcomes from isolated events. This study extents our knowledge of event leverage by exploring the possibility to develop a sustainable sport event leveraging framework for medium sized events in a medium sized city.