Many sports franchises have been ubiquitously incorporating retro elements in the context of their brand story to capture nascent markets and to strengthen bonds with the existing customer base. The Toronto Maple Leafs, for example, have opted for a new logo, the roots of which go back to the 1938 design and incorporated elements of their rich brand heritage and tradition of success within the brand mark (Creamer, 2016). Like the Maple Leafs, the Sacramento Kings have recently introduced updated team logos that emphasize the team's history and convey the story of the franchise (Lukas, 2016). Likewise, the Utah Jazz have integrated heritage elements into the design of their team warmups by reviving the sleeved jerseys of the 1980s (Larsen, 2016). Evidently, incorporating retromarketing tactics into the overall marketing strategy has become commonplace in the sport industry; however, little research has been conducted on the intricacies of the consumer interpretation process of retro elements in a sport brand.

Timely market expansion coupled with budding financial viability of retro branding strategies exemplified by Mitchell and Ness Nostalgia Company (M&N) could perhaps be attributed to positive emotions that retro brands induce (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003). This, in turn, reinforces brand dependability and staid perceptions in the eyes of the consumer (Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012). Nostalgic value of memories is an integral component of one's personal history with a team, which tends to increase if such moments were shared with family members (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). Evidently, these nostalgic associations stimulated M&N’s colossal rise in sales numbers of retro merchandise from $2.8 million in 2000 to $25 million in 2002 (Century, 2003). Furthermore, M&N’s high profitability was not left unnoticed and resulted in an acquisition of the company by the Sports Licensed Division of Adidas in 2007 (Siegel, 2015).

Despite a two-decade long widespread adoration of retro attributes by consumers and an ongoing grapple for new market segments by various sport entities, research on how the sport consumers perceive historical associations and what elements evoke an affectionate response remains in its infancy phase. In addition, while there has been a “nostalgia boom” in the sport industry from an apparel and branding standpoint and logo redesign has been the topic of empirical investigation (see Ahn, Suh, Lee, & Pedersen, 2012), how fans interpret the elements of retro brands and the potential benefits of retro branding has escaped empirical investigation. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine what “retro” means to sport consumers and how various retro marketing practices trigger thoughts and feelings toward the target brand.

Review of Literature
The deeper we delve into individual product design elements that could affect consumer perceptions as theorized by Dickson and Ginter (1987), the inclination of merchandise sellers like M&N to revamp existing product lines and introduce items filled with retro styles in attempts to reach untapped, yet viable markets, seems reasonable. Indeed, established brands evoke memories of previous eras and awaken communal experiences in the mind of consumers (Brown et al., 2003) in order to connect them to communities that shared certain social bonds and tangible experiences (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). In the midst of a proliferation of retromarketing practices, unlike the conventional goods sector, the sports industry has drawn relatively scant attention. Given that historical attributes of sport teams are salient to the popularity of throwback merchandise (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007), this notion has necessitated numerous sport organizations making rebranding decisions to remain financially relevant and to maintain a differentiated identity (Ahn et al., 2012).

While attempting to understand the impact of retro marketing initiatives, prior research has been able to untangle numerous quandaries for marketing practitioners. To pinpoint, various brands have been able to leverage and convey vivid heritage messages to their advantage (Urde, Greyser, & Balmer, 2007), which allowed them to preserve loyalty.
and trust frequently verified to be instrumental in purchasing decisions (Brown et al., 2003). Further, retro marketing practices have been utilized as an instrument to create nostalgic appeals that resonate with the unique perceptions of each individual consumer to influence purchasing behavior (Zhao, Li, Teng, & Lu, 2014). Specifically, Keller (1993) noted how consumers tend to associate brands with past events through strong and distinct memories that impact favorability and decision-making.

Methods and Anticipated Contributions
The researcher implemented a qualitative research design to gain a deeper understanding of how the sport consumers perceived historical brand associations, how various retrobranding practices evoked cognitive and affective responses, and the role that nostalgia played in the interpretation of a retro brand. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with sport consumers, who indicated a knowledge and proclivity towards the retro marketing practices of their favorite team, were conducted until data saturation was achieved. Based on a preliminary interpretation of the interviews, the anticipated contributions of the study are as follows.

The analysis of the interviews revealed that the retro elements in a sport brand were capable of evoking nostalgic feelings associated with one’s childhood experiences. Participants noted that the retro designs resonated with fond experiences from the past, and these memories, in turn, stimulated intentions to rekindle and to honor past events. In interpreting the data related to the specifics of the retro components, it was observed that a combination of transparent and harmonic elements in the design were attached to the word “retro” when it was applied to the sport context.