The growth of sport sponsorship has led to an increase in the number of studies measuring sponsorship outcomes in different sport settings. Most studies focus on understanding the factors leading to purchase intentions (e.g., Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross, & Maroco, 2013; Kim, Lee, Magnusen, & Kim, 2015), including team loyalty, sponsor-team exclusivity, fit and attitudes towards the sponsor (Alexandris, Tsiotsou, & James, 2012; Olson, 2010). Also, some recent studies have highlighted the need to measure actual purchase behaviors (Mazodier & Merunka, 2012; Zaharia, Biscaia, Stotlar, & Gray, 2016). Nevertheless, sponsorship that is effective in associating the sponsor with a particular team may alienate fans from opposing teams (Amorim & Almeida, 2015; Davies, Veloutsou, & Costa, 2006). Moreover, this kind of alienation depends on the size of the sponsor, as small brands are better positioned to sponsor a specific team while bigger brands can sponsor several teams or a league, regardless of the existing sport rivalry (Bergkvist, 2012). However, little research has been done to examine the effects of a joint sponsorship arrangement on the purchase intentions and actual behavior of supporters of rival teams in a professional sport league context. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine a sport sponsorship model including team loyalty, sponsorship exclusivity, fit, attitude toward the sponsor, intentions not to purchase rival sponsors’ products, and actual purchases for a National Football League’s (NFL) sponsor.

In the sports context, team loyalty represents a form of psychological connection to a team resulting in consistent and enduring positive behaviors and attitudes toward a team (Funk & James, 2001). Past studies were mainly based on the idea that the stronger the link with the team, the more the fans might feel it is their duty to purchase the sponsors products as a way to repay the sponsoring brands for supporting the team (Biscaia et al., 2013). Yet, Davies and colleagues (2006) noted that the most committed supporters were the least accepting of acquiring a sponsor’s products when a joint sponsorship arrangement with a rival team was set up. Furthermore, if individuals perceive the sponsor and event/team to be highly related, and they view the event/team in a positive manner, then they are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes toward the sponsor (Dees, Bennett, & Ferreira, 2010; Mazodier & Merunka, 2012). However, even when the sponsor and the event/team are highly related, fans can reject a joint sponsorship if rival teams are involved (Davies et al., 2006). Also, purchase intentions are commonly suggested as having a direct effect on actual purchase behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) but academic consideration dedicated to a better understanding of purchase intentions and behaviors in the rivalry context of sport sponsorship has yet to be conducted (Biscaia et al., 2013; Gwinner & Bennett, 2008). The hypotheses specified in the proposed model are:

H1: Team loyalty will have a direct positive effect on sponsorship exclusivity.

H2: Team loyalty will have a direct positive effect on fit.

H3: Team loyalty will have a direct positive effect on attitude toward the sponsor.

H4: Team loyalty will have a direct negative effect on attitude toward the sponsor.

H5: Sponsorship exclusivity will have a direct negative effect on intentions not to purchase rival sponsors’ products.

H6: Fit will have a direct positive effect on attitude toward the sponsor.

H7: Fit will have a direct negative effect on intentions not to purchase rival sponsors’ products.
H8: Attitude toward the sponsor will have a direct negative effect on intentions not to purchase rival sponsors’ products.

H9: Intentions not to purchase rival sponsors’ products will have a direct negative effect on actual purchases.

In order to test these hypotheses, the questionnaire was initially assessed by using one pilot study to revise the clarity, readability, format, and content of the survey (cf. Churchill & Brown, 2004). The pilot study was completed via an online survey distributed to participants aged 21 and up at six universities across the United States (N = 79), where they rated the effectiveness of the NFL league-wide beer sponsor. The survey was refined according to feedback from the pilot study, and the final questionnaire was developed based on the results of the pilot study, and will be constantly advertised to administrators of NFL’s official fan clubs. This online questionnaire includes a total of 24 items adapted from previous studies conducted in the sport sponsorship context and will also contain new items: team loyalty (Biscaia et al., 2013), sponsorship exclusivity (Davies et al., 2006), fit (Speed & Thompson, 2000), attitude toward the sponsors (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008), intentions not to purchase rival sponsors’ products (new items), and actual purchases (new items). Data collection is on-going throughout the 2017 NFL season and will be completed in February 2018. Before any analyses will be conducted, the normality of the data will be assessed by looking at skewness and kurtosis values. To assess the measurement model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and a structural equation model (SEM) will be performed.

The researchers will provide an in-depth discussion of the results generated by the NFL fans on the NFL league-wide beer sponsor (e.g., do New York Jets fans living in Connecticut choose not to purchase Bud Light when the cans are branded with the New England Patriots logo?). From a practical utility perspective, the researchers surmise that the study aims at providing fundamental insights to the effects of a joint sponsorship arrangement on the purchase intentions and actual behavior of supporters of rival teams in a professional sport league context. It is possible that the NFL can use the results of this study to assess the viability of having a league-wide sponsor in contrast with having team-specific sponsors. Also, results from this study will aid sponsors to better understand product branding strategies (Hayran & Gürhan-Canli, 2016) in multi-franchise media markets. The presentation will include a further discussion of practical utility, in addition to the finalized results, figures with the standardized estimates of the structural model, limitations, and future research directions.