Introduction
Due to their loyal audiences and the fact that games are unpredictable, perishable, and somewhat DVR-proof, sport properties have become a popular sponsorship option used by businesses to confront advertising clutter (Fortunato, 2013). But despite the appealing reasons to become a sponsor of a sport property, advertising clutter is also present in this space, presenting additional challenges for marketing executives. The question arises: How do sponsors stand out among the increasing clutter at sporting events? With increased pressure from chief financial officers (CFO) on marketers to show return on investment (ROI), there is a need for additional methods to pre-select sponsorships and evaluate sponsorship effectiveness (Taylor, 2009). Previous studies have shown that sponsorship recall, a way to measure sponsorship effectiveness, increases when a consumer sees a logical “fit” between a sponsor and sport entity (Cornwell, Pruitt, & VanNess, 2001). The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between perceived sport sponsorship congruence and sponsorship recall based on a variety of external congruence factors.

Literature Review
Sponsorship congruence refers to how well a sponsor and sport community fit together. “Congruence theory suggests that storage in memory and retrieval of information are influenced by relatedness or similarity, such that viewing an event, for example, that is sponsored by a running shoe brand seems appropriate and is easily remembered” (Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005, p. 27). There is support for the value in perceived congruence between sponsor and event. People best remember information that is consistent with expectations, and as experimental studies found, congruence typically holds a significant positive relationship with recall for sponsorship stimuli (Cornwell et al., 2005). Prendergast, Poon, and West (2010) characterize sponsorship congruence in two parameters: (1) individual congruence: the level of congruence between an individual’s self-assessment of identification with the sport property, and (2) external sponsor congruence: congruence between the sponsoring organization and the property. The focus of the current study was to examine external congruence factors discussed in the sponsorship literature to determine which external congruence factors are important in influencing sponsorship effectiveness.

Fortunato (2013) and Olsen and Thjørnøe (2011) labeled five external sponsorship congruence factors that can assist in potential sponsorship pre-selection. Further, these factors require no activation or articulation to communicate congruence. These five congruence factors are image, functional, purchase, geographic, and multi-sponsor congruence. In a sponsorship context, balance theory states that an individual will seek a balanced, consistent relationship between an event and sponsor (Cornwell et al., 2005). Therefore, it may be concluded that congruence, no matter the form, will have a significant positive relationship with sponsorship recall. However, it is not known which external sponsorship congruence factors may influence recall and if the impact of each of those factors may vary based on the general fit between a sport organization and a given sponsor.

Methods
As college students are reported to have high levels of individual congruence with their undergraduate university (Woo, Trail, Kwon, & Anderson, 2009) and students represent a large proportion of the consumers of collegiate sports events (Sabri et al., 2008), undergraduate students at a NCAA Division I-FBS university located in the southeastern United States were surveyed. High levels of individual congruence were necessary in order to examine a homogeneous sample to detect recall differences due to external congruence.

University students who had attended at least one men’s and/or women’s basketball game during the 2016-2017 season at the time of the data collection were included in the population of the study (N=8,220). Email addresses
were uploaded to an online surveying system and 85% of surveys (N=7,008) were successfully delivered. Of those 7,008 students who received the survey, 1,003 students completed it, and 343 useable surveys were included in data analysis. The low response rate (5%) is most likely due to survey burnout as the remaining 660 surveys were only partially completed.

To increase ease and flow of the survey, semi-aided recall was utilized to measure respondents’ knowledge of current sponsors (Alreck, Settle, & Settle, 2003). Students were provided three sponsorship categories based on general level of congruence (low-fit, medium-fit, and high-fit) and asked to identify the university’s corresponding sponsor. These responses were coded by the researcher and assigned numerical value for 1 being correct and 0 being incorrect. To measure one’s perceived sponsor congruence based on external factors, fixed-alternative questions were used through a checklist style that allowed participants to provide multiple answers to a single question (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). These questions measured the five factors of congruence outlined in the literature review: (a) image, (b) function, (c) purchase, (d) geographic, and (e) multiple-sponsor (Fortunato, 2013) for each sponsor (low, medium, and high fit). Additionally, respondents were asked how many games they had attended during the season to control for the varying amount of sponsor exposure.

Three binary logistic regression models were developed to examine how the independent variables (external congruence factors and number of games attended) influenced the dependent variable (recall) of the low, medium, and high-fit sponsors.

Results and Discussion

The results indicated that specific external congruence factors were significant for different levels of sponsorship-fit. The low-fit binary logistic regression was significant: X² (df = 7, n = 343) = 23.62, p < .001; Nagelkerke R² = .101. Two of the five independent variables showed significance: geographic congruence (β = -1.18, p = .001) and functional congruence (β = 2.37, p=.05). Seventy-seven respondents correctly recalled the low-fit congruence sponsor whereas 264 did not. The medium-fit binary logistic regression was significant: X² (df = 7, n = 343) = 26.50, p < .001; Nagelkerke R² = .100. Purchase congruence was the only independent variable to have significance: (β = -0.78, p = .013). Two hundred four respondents correctly recalled the medium-fit congruence sponsor whereas 139 did not. The high-fit binary logistic regression was not significant: X² (df = 7, n = 343) = 10.99, p = .139; Nagelkerke R² = .146. Three hundred thirty four respondents correctly recalled the high-fit congruence sponsor whereas nine did not.

These results indicate that external congruence is impacting sponsor recall. However, additional research is needed on external congruence to provide stronger evidence for the overall construct and its individual sub dimensions. For example, while purchase congruence is significantly related to recall in the low and medium fit sponsor conditions, geographic congruence only affects recall within the low-fit sponsor. It was thought that the number of external congruence factors found in the sponsorship should increase as general sponsor fit increases, yet this is not the case. Image congruence shows no significance across sponsor level, yet previous studies stress the positive effects image congruence has on subsequent attitudes and behavior. Additional research will contribute to and expand upon the importance of congruence within sport sponsorships.