Rebranding is a common phenomenon among contemporary Minor League Baseball (MiLB) franchises. During the 2017–2018 off-season, two preexisting teams changed names and logos, and another three revealed new logos (Hill, 2018). Because rebranding is an expensive and laborious procedure (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007; Stuart & Muzellec, 2004), many Major League Baseball teams who have already built strong brand equity do not undergo rebranding. However, a myriad of changes can be frequently seen in MiLB teams, most likely because of more frequent changes in managerial conditions such as team ownership, affiliation, and relocation (Ballouli, Grady, & Stewart, 2016; Kaegel, 2010).

Rebranding is defined as “the practice of building a new name representative of a differentiated position in the mindset of stakeholders and a distinctive identity from competitors” (Muzellec, Doogan, & Lambkin, 2003, p. 32). Rebranding can consist of changes to one or more brand elements (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). If the changes are only minor improvements to the brand (i.e., logo, slogan, imagery), then they are known as evolutionary branding, whereas major changes (i.e., new name, core business philosophies) are referred to as revolutionary rebranding (Daly & Moloney, 2005; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006).

Rebranding brings considerable, potential risks because it takes a while to build a strong fan base (Keller, 2002). However, successful rebranding strategies can result in substantial rewards. In the case of MiLB franchise, previous research has shown that successful rebranding can improve the attendance rate in the season following a change in name or logo, probably because of the increased interest and excitement in the local community (Wachter, 2010). For example, the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp experienced a 23% increase in attendance during the first season after its revolutionary rebranding (Heilman, 2018). Additionally, rebranding can result in increased merchandise sales and generate new advertising and sponsorship opportunities (Dwyer, Le Crom, Tomasini, & Smith, 2011; Wachter, 2010). However, previous academic efforts to examine rebranding outcomes of professional sport franchises are heavily weighted on investigating short-term outcomes, and few scholars have explored the long-term effects of rebranding. This is important because brand novelty will eventually wear off without a well-planned, long-term rebranding strategy. Thus, the purpose of the study is to explore the long-term key successful factors of sport team rebranding.

Considering the exploratory nature of this study, the researchers will employ a qualitative approach to explore the rebranding practices of 10 MiLB teams to better understand the key antecedents of positive rebranding outcomes in the long term. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews will be conducted with marketing managers of MiLB teams who have experienced evolutionary or revolutionary rebranding between the 2010–2011 season and the 2016–2017 season. The interview guide consists of 20 open-ended questions designed to collect information on each organization’s rebranding strategy, their opinion on the short- and long-term rebranding outcomes, and the challenges they have faced in developing brand equity after rebranding. A comparative analysis of evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding will also be performed. The findings of this research will be presented during the presentation.