

What's Happening

I N T H E U S A ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

VOL 19, NO 9 MAY 2012

NORTH DAKOTA PLAYS THE NAME GAME

Usually North Dakota is a quiet place. Its population is less than a million, and it has only about ten inhabitants per square mile. However, for a few years it has been the center of a loud debate. It is

deciding whether the University of North Dakota can keep its nickname, "Fighting Sioux," and its logo of an American Indian warrior wearing large feathers.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) oversees athletics in American colleges and universities. In 2003 it identified 33 schools that had nicknames and mascots related to American Indians. It asked them to decide for themselves whether their nicknames were "hostile or abusive" toward American Indians.

Schools came to various decisions. Some convinced the NCAA that their nicknames were appropriate. The University of North Carolina at Pembroke remained the "Braves," for example. Many of its students are Native Americans, and it offers a major in Native American Studies. Some schools made changes though. For example, Arkansas State changed from the "Indians" to the "Red Wolves." Southeastern Oklahoma switched from the "Savages" to the "Savage Storm."

In 2005 the NCAA still identified 19 schools whose nicknames could be insulting. Several schools were able to keep their nicknames. The University of Illinois remained the "Fighting Illini," but eliminated its logo of an Indian in a feathered headdress. Three schools proved to the NCAA that they have the support of the tribes whose names they use. They are the Utah "Utes," the Central Michigan "Chippewas" and the Florida State "Seminoles."

In 2007 the NCAA informed schools that they did not have to change, but that they would face penalties. Now the NCAA is penalizing only two universities. Alcorn State in Mississippi remains the "Braves," and North Dakota still uses "Fighting Sioux." The NCAA does not allow them to use the nicknames while playing in post-season tournaments. They also cannot host those tournaments that could earn them a lot of money. Many



schools refuse to play against them, and they cannot attract the best athletes from high schools and junior colleges.

The NCAA would be satisfied if North Dakota had the support of local Sioux. The university needs to get it from two tribes.

The members of the Spirit Lake Sioux

have voted their approval. However, the tribal council of the Standing Rock Sioux opposes the nickname and refuses to hold a vote.

North Dakota's Board of Higher Education told the university to eliminate the name and logo by the end of 2011. They had been on buildings all around campus, and on items like sweatshirts, caps, bumper stickers and notebooks. The school's Web site removed them, and athletic uniforms simply said "ND." The university already had spent about two years getting rid of the logo before the state's lawmakers took action.

In March 2011 the North Dakota Legislature passed a law that required the university to be the "Fighting Sioux." However, the NCAA's penalties went into effect in August, and the legislature repealed the law in November. Then supporters started gathering signatures and submitted them in February 2012 so that North Dakotans will be able to vote on the issue in June. Because of that support, the legislature put the law back into effect immediately.

That vote could amend the state's constitution to require the university to keep the nickname and logo. The state's governor and the university's athletic director are encouraging people to vote "NO" in June. Although they are proud of the "Fighting Sioux," they believe that accepting the NCAA's penalties is not worth it.

In the meantime the Board of Higher Education has taken the matter to court. It argues against the law and June's vote, saying that it alone has the power to manage the state's colleges and universities. On March 15 North Dakota's Supreme Court heard the case, and it will make a decision soon. No matter how it decides, though, it certainly will not settle the larger question of whether "Fighting Sioux" is an honor or insult to Native Americans.

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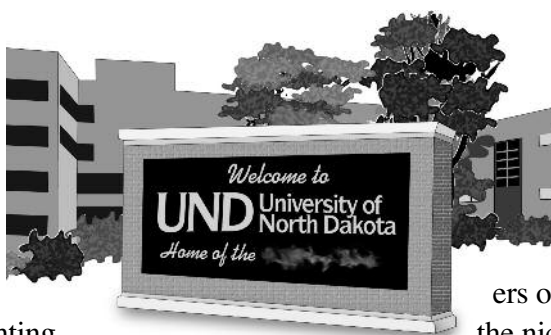
Usually North Dakota is a quiet place. However, for a few years it has been having a loud debate. It is deciding whether the University of North Dakota can keep its nickname, "Fighting Sioux," and its logo of an American Indian warrior.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) governs athletics in American universities. In 2003 it identified 33 schools that had nicknames and logos related to American Indians. It asked them to decide whether they were offensive.

Schools came to different decisions. The University of North Carolina at Pembroke convinced the NCAA that "Braves" was appropriate. Many of its students are Native Americans, and it offers a major in Native American Studies. Some schools made changes though, like from "Indians" to "Red Wolves" and from "Savages" to the "Savage Storm."

In 2005 the NCAA still identified 19 schools whose nicknames could be insulting. Several schools were able to keep their nicknames. The University of Illinois remained the "Fighting Illini," but stopped using its logo of an Indian in a feathered headdress. Three schools proved to the NCAA that they have the support of the tribes whose names they use.

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The NCAA would be satisfied if North Dakota had the support of local Sioux. The members of the Spirit Lake Sioux have voted their approval. However, the leaders of the Standing Rock Sioux oppose the nickname and refuse to hold a vote.

North Dakota's Board of Higher Education told the university to stop using the name and logo by 2012. They had been all around campus, and on items like caps and notebooks. The school's Web site removed them, and athletic uniforms just said "ND." The university already had spent about two years getting rid of the logo before lawmakers took action.

In March 2011 the state passed a law that required the university to be the "Fighting Sioux." However, after the NCAA's penalties began in August, the state repealed the law. Then in February 2012 supporters got signatures so that North Dakotans will be able to vote on the issue. Because of that support, the legislature put the law back into effect immediately.

That vote in June could change the state's constitution. It would require the university to keep the nickname and logo. The governor and the university's athletic director want people to vote "NO." Although they are proud of the "Fighting Sioux," they believe that accepting the NCAA's penalties is not worth it.

The Board of Higher Education has taken the matter to court. It argues that it alone has the power to manage the state's colleges and universities. On March 15 North Dakota's Supreme Court heard the case, and it will make a decision soon. No matter how it decides, though, it certainly will not settle the larger question of whether "Fighting Sioux" is an honor or insult to Native Americans.

Background Information

The U.S. government recognizes 565 tribes. Their population totals about 5.2 million American Indians and Alaska natives. That forms less than 2 percent of the U.S. population.

The National Congress of American Indians, an advocacy group, first challenged the use of Native American mascots in 1968.

Stanford University switched its nickname from “Indian” to “Cardinal” in 1972. In 1994 St. John’s University changed its nickname from “Redmen” to “Red Storm.”

The NCAA’s request that schools consider changing their nicknames in 2003 was in response to a recommendation by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to eliminate such images.

According to a study at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, about 6,500 elementary, middle schools and high schools in the U.S. also use nicknames related to American Indians.

In the late 1800s North Dakota’s athletic teams were known unofficially as the “Nodaks.” In 1911 the students adopted the name “Flickertails.” The “Sioux” nickname came in 1930, but it is not clear exactly when it became the “Fighting Sioux.”

A Spirit Lake tribal elder says that American Indians actually approved the nickname and logo during a special ceremony with university officials in 1969.

In a 2007 legal settlement with UND, the NCAA gave the university three years to get approval from the Sioux tribes.

Tribal councils of Sioux outside North Dakota have adopted resolutions opposing the Fighting Sioux name and logo. Other tribes have too, including North Dakota’s Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa.

In August 2011 the governor and leaders from the university went to the NCAA’s headquarters in Indiana. There they failed to convince the organization that the name and logo had popular support. The NCAA’s penalties went into effect a few days later.

Already the university has lost chances to host a softball series, cross-country meets, swim meets and a track meet.

Supporters needed 13,500 signatures to place the issue on the June 2012 ballot. They turned in more than 17,000.

In 2010 Wisconsin became the first state to pass a law that gives residents the right to challenge the use of ethnic nicknames, logos and mascots at schools.

Topics for Discussion and Writing

Pre-reading:

- How do schools decide what their mascots will be?

Comprehension:

- Trace the steps that the debate took on its way to North Dakota’s Supreme Court.

Beyond the Text:

- Explain how a nickname related to Native Americans could be insulting.
- How do athletes in high school and junior college decide which universities to attend?
- Find the nicknames of some high schools and colleges near you, and tell why you think they took those names.

Vocabulary (*advanced article only)

Article-specific: inhabitant*; logo; abusive*; headdress; tribe; penalty; tournament; to repeal

High-use: debate; to identify; hostile*; appropriate; to eliminate*; to host; council*; to oppose; to require; to submit*; to amend*

Sources

Grand Forks Herald (N.D.) March 16, 8, Feb. 15, 2012; Dec. 19, 2011

NPR “Morning Edition” March 15, 2012

Associated Press March 15, 2012

The Oregonian February 22, 2012

New York Times Upfront February 20, 2012

New York Times February 18, 2012

Bismarck Tribune February 12, 2012; November 7, 2011

Washington Times February 9, 2012

CA Curricular Standards (4–12)

English-Language Arts

Reading 1.0 Vocabulary Development

2.0 Comprehension (Informational Materials)

Writing 1.0 Writing Strategies

2.0 Writing Applications

ELD—Intermediate and Advanced

Reading Vocabulary Development/Comprehension

Writing Strategies and Applications

Listening and Speaking

History-Social Science

4.2; 5.1; 5.3; 8.2; 11.10