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COMM 773

Sports Communication & Culture

### **Activity 6A. Is race still a problem in sports?**

1. Read Chapter 9: Race and Ethnicity in Sports
2. Case: A college near you is forming a football team. They want to call the team the Redskins. The mascot is a caricature of a Native American in war paint and feather headdress carrying a tomahawk. They have come to you to ask your advice about using this mascot.
3. Locate at least 3 articles online or in the NYIT electronic library that contain recent examples of the controversy.
4. Develop a 500 word essay in which you discuss the issue, its impact and possible solutions.
5. Due March 23, 2009

They are currently many sports teams whose name has been derived from a Native American origin in various sports including baseball, hockey, football, lacrosse and rugby. Some examples of these teams are notably – the Atlanta Braves, the Chicago Blackhawks, Kansas City Chiefs, and the Washington Redskins. But the list is much longer of sports teams whose names used to refer to a Native American reference. This list includes many college teams like the Midwestern State Indians who became the Mustangs and the Syracuse Orangemen, who are now called the Syracuse Orange.

Another school that changed their school mascot and team name was the St. John's University Redmen. In 1995 the St. John's Redmen became the St. John's Red Storm. At that time was in my second year of undergraduate studies at St. John's and my brother, a senior, was on the Cheerleading Squad for the basketball team. At that time, St. John's had a pretty well known basketball team and this name change did get significant media attention. The school insisted that the Redmen referred to the school color, which was a bright red. There was quite the debate around campus but in the end the school did change the name.

In the Sport Illustrated article, The Indian Wars, polls suggest that most Native American activists are opposed to using Indian names and mascots in High School, College and Professional Sports. However, the American Indian general population seems to have less of an opposition to the idea of using Indian team names and mascots. In addition, the article states that many professional sports teams including the Atlanta Braves, Cleveland Indians, Chicago Blackhawks, and the Washington Redskins on that record stated that they have no intention of ever changing the name of their teams. Many claim that the team name is not meant in a derogatory manner but it is meant to celebrate the traditions of the American Indian culture.

There are many organizations that would tend to disagree with the Sports Illustrated poll. One such organization would be the National Coalition on Sports and Racism. They feel that "The American public has been conditioned by sports industry, educational institutions, and the media to trivialize Indigenous culture's common and harmless entertainment." The article mentions the many university who have

already changed their names, as well as, the fact that the Los Angeles Board of Education has banned the Indian images and names in their schools in order to illuminate the misrepresentation and abuse of Indigenous people.

But not all feel the same; Jared Stenzel writes in his article *Allow the Use of Native American Sports Names*, "As long as the logos, team names, and slogans or cheers are not demeaning to Native Americans, there is no reason at all that we cannot honor these tribes as a school." The question is...are we becoming overly sensitive to the team names...if we eliminate the Redskins and the Chiefs do we have to also show the same respect to the Boston Celtics who have the Irish Men or the Minnesota Viking or the Green Bay "Meat Packers."

## **Works Cited**

The Indian Wars, Sports Illustrated March 2, 2002

<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2005/magazine/08/17/indian.wars030402/index.html>

American Indians are people, not mascots – Charlene Teters

<http://www.aimovement.org/ncrsm/index.html>

Allow the Use of Native American Sports Names, Jared Stenzel, November 19,

2007 <http://www.socyberty.com/Ethnicity/Allow-the-Use-of-Native-American-Sports-Names.59954>