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The NCAA: mascots and minorities

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
The NCAA: mascots and minorities
NOVEMBER 16, 2005

It is here! "ESPN Mobile" has arrived. It will join ESPN, ESPN2, ESPN Classic, ESPNU, ESPNNews, ESPN Radio, ESPN International, ESPN.com, ESPN The Magazine, ESPN Original Entertainment, ESPN Merchandise, ESPN Zone, ESPN Enterprises, ESPN Regional Television, ESPN Now, ESPN Extra, ESPN HD, and Sports Ticker Enterprises, in the ESPN family.

ESPN has taken "ubiquity" to the next level. It is ready when you are, it's got you covered, it's like having an entire sports universe in your pocket. ESPN, The Family, makes the Bushes and the Corleone's look like small time operators. It would seem that the most likely next step must be "ESPN Your Life," an electronic multiplex that will allow the subscriber to be completely engulfed by SportsWorld and terminate all other forms of existence.

Until that great day arrives the mundane issues of ordinary sports existence will have to suffice.

The NCAA is still out on patrol on the mascot front. Rulings just keep on coming in a haphazard and random fashion. Florida State, Central Michigan, and Utah have been approved for continued use of their mascots and nicknames. The fact that these schools garnered support from Native Americans helped them win their argument with the NCAA.

Looking at these successes, Arkansas State University is enlisting the assistance of local people of Cherokee descent in their cause. The ASU athletic director said: "The comments we have received from our fans and alumni are overwhelmingly in support of our portrayal of Native American heritage. It is our objective to represent Native Americans in a dignified and stately manner." ASU will have a hearing before the NCAA later this month. Their nickname is the Indians and a costume Indian is the mascot. Local Cherokees were not as impressed as fans and alumni by this mascot.

Meanwhile, the University of Illinois had its mascot appeal rejected by the NCAA, although the school nickname, "The Fighting Illini," was found acceptable. The university said it was gratified by the decision on the nickname, but would

consider an appeal on the mascot, Chief Illiniwek, a character the NCAA terms a "hostile and abusive" image. The Chief has been active in the Illinois program since 1926.

Tom Hardy, a spokesman for the University, said that he was gratified by the NCAA decision on the nickname. "I'm sure that will be comforting to the students and hundreds of thousands of alumni who are proud to call themselves Illini." It is not clear from reports whether this was a sarcastic comment or Mr. Hardy was being sincere. One can only hope it was the former.

The University of North Dakota is appealing an unfavorable ruling by the NCAA on its mascot and nickname, "The Fighting Sioux." The State Board of Higher Education in North Dakota is supporting the UND appeal and is encouraging the university to meet with local Native Americans to seek support. Bradley and Indiana University of Pennsylvania are also appealing NCAA decisions.

In other developments, Carthage College of Wisconsin will drop all images of Native Americans and mascots from its use in connection with the name Red Men, a name originally having nothing to do with Native Americans, but chosen because a nearby high school called itself the "Blue Boys." (Insert your own joke here). Carthage will be allowed to keep its name, but not its logo or mascots. The Midwestern State University Indians of Texas announced that they, too, would be dropping its nickname and logos. The NCAA commended these universities for taking action to end these abusive and insulting images. These were the first two institutions from the NCAA list to voluntarily initiate changes.

Thus there has been considerable progress achieved in higher education in America. I am surprised that the NCAA has not supplied these institutions with the funding to pay for the costs of logo removal out of the same fund that will reward students for actually being students.

There is still one major violator on the loose. Southeastern Oklahoma State University has not changed its nickname or mascot. "The Savages" were still using that name as of last weekend. Believe it or not, you can get a "Dennis Rodman Throwback Jersey" by Adidas with the "Savages" and "10" on the front and "Rodman" on the back. It is on sale for \$99, a saving of \$150.

Apparently the NCAA is so busy with this issue that they have nearly forgotten about the issue of minority football coaches. The Black Coaches Association reminded the NCAA last week that during the past year black football coaching hires in big time programs failed to reach one percent. Seventeen of the thirty institutions that hired head football coaches in 2004-5 either did not interview a minority candidate or did not include members of minority groups on their hiring committees.

Black coaches constitute three percent of all coaches in Division I-A and I-AA while more than half the players at these same schools are black. The Black Coaches Association is considering legal action unless there is some improvement next year.

Clearly, in Division I football one of the issues remains booster groups dominated by affluent white businessmen that do not want a hiring process but want simply to name a coach outright. Another problem stems from the old-boy network in which there is severe under-representation of Blacks at the level of athletic director and university president, both of which are 95% white. Until these things change, little else will change.

In point of fact, the NCAA seems unwilling to use its full power to force such a change, although it will continue to pursue mascots and sabotage Title IX enforcement vigorously.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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