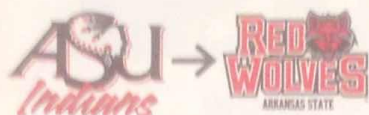


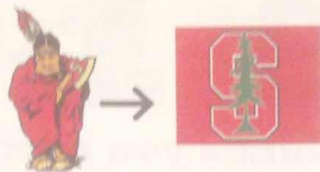
Benching Their Mascots

Many schools have dropped Indian names



Arkansas State University

Then: Indians | Now: Red Wolves



Stanford University (CA)

Then: Indians | Now: Cardinal



St. John's University (NY)

Then: Redmen | Now: Red Storm



University of North Dakota

Then: Fighting Sioux | New name in 2015

their Indian names are a vital part of their tradition and identity. About 900 teams across the U.S. still sport Native American names—from pro franchises like hockey's Chicago Blackhawks and baseball's Atlanta Braves, to college teams like the Utah Utes, to elementary, middle, and high school teams in most states. That figure is down from 3,000 teams 40 years ago, according to the Morning Star Institute, an Indian rights group in Washington, D.C.

Critics say such names—and the rituals that often go with them, like the Braves' "tomahawk chop"—perpetuate old stereotypes about American Indians.

"Every time the Atlanta Braves do their tomahawk chop . . . we are no longer successful businessmen, doctors, soldiers, co-workers, or neighbors," says Cynthia Connolly of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians in Michigan. "To the fan, we exist only in the 1800s as a warrior culture."

Until recently, much of the debate over Indian mascots played out in college sports. In 2005, after decades of lobbying by Native American groups, the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) identified 19 universities whose team names it deemed "hostile or abusive" to American Indians. The NCAA ordered teams

to change their names or get permission from tribes to continue using them. Most agreed to change, including

Arkansas State University's Indians, which became the Red Wolves, and Southeastern Oklahoma State's Savages, which are now the Savage Storm.

Teams & Tribes

But while many tribes applauded the changes, others fought to keep schools' Indian mascots. The Spirit Lake Tribe, one of the two Sioux tribes in North Dakota, sued the NCAA in 2009 to preserve the University of North Dakota's Fighting Sioux. (In 2011, a state law forced the retirement of the 81-year-old mascot.)

In Florida, the Seminole Tribe granted permission to Florida State University to keep using its Seminoles name—and its popular Chief Osceola mascot, who rides triumphantly onto the field on a spotted Appaloosa horse before every home football game in Tallahassee. In return, the school provides scholarships

and reduced tuition to tribe members.

"We Seminoles embrace the mascot," says James Billie, the tribe's chairman. "They honor us."

That's what many teams say about their Indian mascots. Redskins owner Daniel Snyder, who has refused to consider a name change, points out that the team's first roster in 1933 included four Native American players.

"Our team name captures the best of who we are and who we can be, by staying true to our history and honoring the deep and enduring values our name represents," he said in a letter on the NFL's website earlier this year.

The trademark ruling, which the Redskins are appealing, is largely symbolic: The team can still use its name, but it may be harder to fight against counterfeit Redskins gear, which could result in lost sales of authorized merchandise.

The team is also feeling pressure from lawmakers. In May, 50 senators (all Democrats) wrote to the NFL's commissioner, asking him to force the Redskins to drop their mascot. (The NFL is backing the team.) And President Obama has weighed in, saying if he were Snyder, he'd consider selecting a new name.

That's what another Redskins team did recently. Cooperstown High School in New York switched from Redskins to Hawkeyes last year after Emily Greenberg and other students petitioned the local school board to get rid of the Native American mascot.

"It's about understanding . . . that tradition can change," says Greenberg, 18, now a freshman at Columbia University, in New York. "And having a new tradition is so exciting." •



Florida State University Seminoles

The state's Seminole Tribe endorses the mascot and helps with Chief Osceola's garb and makeup.

