

# Aniak Halfbreeds? Proud name; Washington Redskins? Racist slur

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On Nov. 2, the Washington Redskins will play the Minnesota Vikings in a National Football League game. That the Vikings have a running back who switched his son with a stick until he bled is one issue. The other is that the game will be played at the University of Minnesota football stadium and its president has asked that all reference to the offensive nickname "Redskins" be deleted from uniforms, advertising and commentary.

The Washington football franchise has a history of racism. The then owner, George P. Marshall refused to hire black players until 1962 when the Kennedy administration threatened civil rights actions unless the team was integrated.

The current owner, Dan Snyder, is embroiled in a long-standing controversy over the Redskins nickname. Polls indicate Americans are ambivalent or generally accept the name Redskins. Other polls and editorials by Native organizations, such as the newspaper Indian Country Today, indicate widespread opposition among Native Americans. When Snyder was asked by 10 members of Congress to change the name, he replied, "We will never change the name of the team."

Last June the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, at the request of indigenous groups, canceled the Redskins' trademark considering the name disparaging to Native Americans. It is ironic that a team representing our nation's capital should have a nickname historically used as a slur against First Americans.

A similar controversy concerns the University of North Dakota Fighting Sioux sports teams. Unlike "redskin" the term "Sioux" is not inherently derogatory but has become a cultural battleground. In 1999, the North Dakota House of Representatives tried but failed to pass a bill to change the Sioux nickname because of Native American objections. In 2001, a wealthy alumnus named Ralph Engelstad donated \$100 million to build an arena on condition the Fighting Sioux name remain unchanged. He had thousands of Indian-head Sioux logos embedded in cement and tile throughout the arena as disincentive to change the name. Various North Dakota boards of higher education and state legislature's fought the name change through legal challenges until they were threatened with sanctions by the NCAA for having hostile or abusive racial/ethnic/national origin references. The state acquiesced and has until 2015 to pick a new logo.

Perhaps the decision was influenced by photos of partying UND students in red-face makeup wearing t-shirts emblazoned with "Siouxper Drunk" and an image of a drunken Indian sucking on a beer bong. Even more offensive is a rival North Dakota State T-shirt of an Indian performing a sexual act on a bison, that school's mascot.

Warroad, Minnesota, bills itself as "Hockeytown, USA." The high school in the town of 1,700 by the Canadian border has a proud hockey tradition including contributing many athletes to Olympic and professional teams and producing two of the best-ever Native American hockey players: Henry Boucha and T.J. Oshie. An activist group led by Clyde Bellecourt, co-founder of the American Indian Movement, wants Warroad to change its Warriors nickname. Boucha, however, points out the town and the Ojibwa community wants to keep the name. The logo was designed by the Indian Parent Committee. Warriors they were, Warriors they are, and Warriors they want to proudly remain.

Then there's the Aniak Halfbreeds. No high school nickname in Alaska, perhaps the United States, raises more eyebrows than when Aniak takes the basketball floor with Halfbreeds across their chests. According to journalist Dan Joling, in a 2005 Associated Press article, the nickname was chosen by students in the late 1970s. Before that the boy's teams were called the Apostles and girl's teams the Angels. Good choice to change the nicknames. Most of the residents are mixed-blood. The school board president at the time, Wayne Morgan, is quoted by Joling as saying, "Most people are of mixed race, mixed background. We're proud of it. The kids are still proud of it."

So what's the difference between an Aniak Halfbreed and a Washington Redskin? Plenty.

Aniak, like Warroad, chose the name, and the community largely embraces the name. They have control to use or change the name. The term redskin is offensive to many Native Americans and Americans. It's an intentional use of a slur by the non-Native power structure to subjugate and marginalize. Use of a derogatory name sends the message "we can use a name that offends you and you can't do anything about it." The name reflects an attitude of dominance and superiority and that's racism.

Change your team's name, Dan Snyder. The Washington Embarrassment would be a good choice.

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